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KISS

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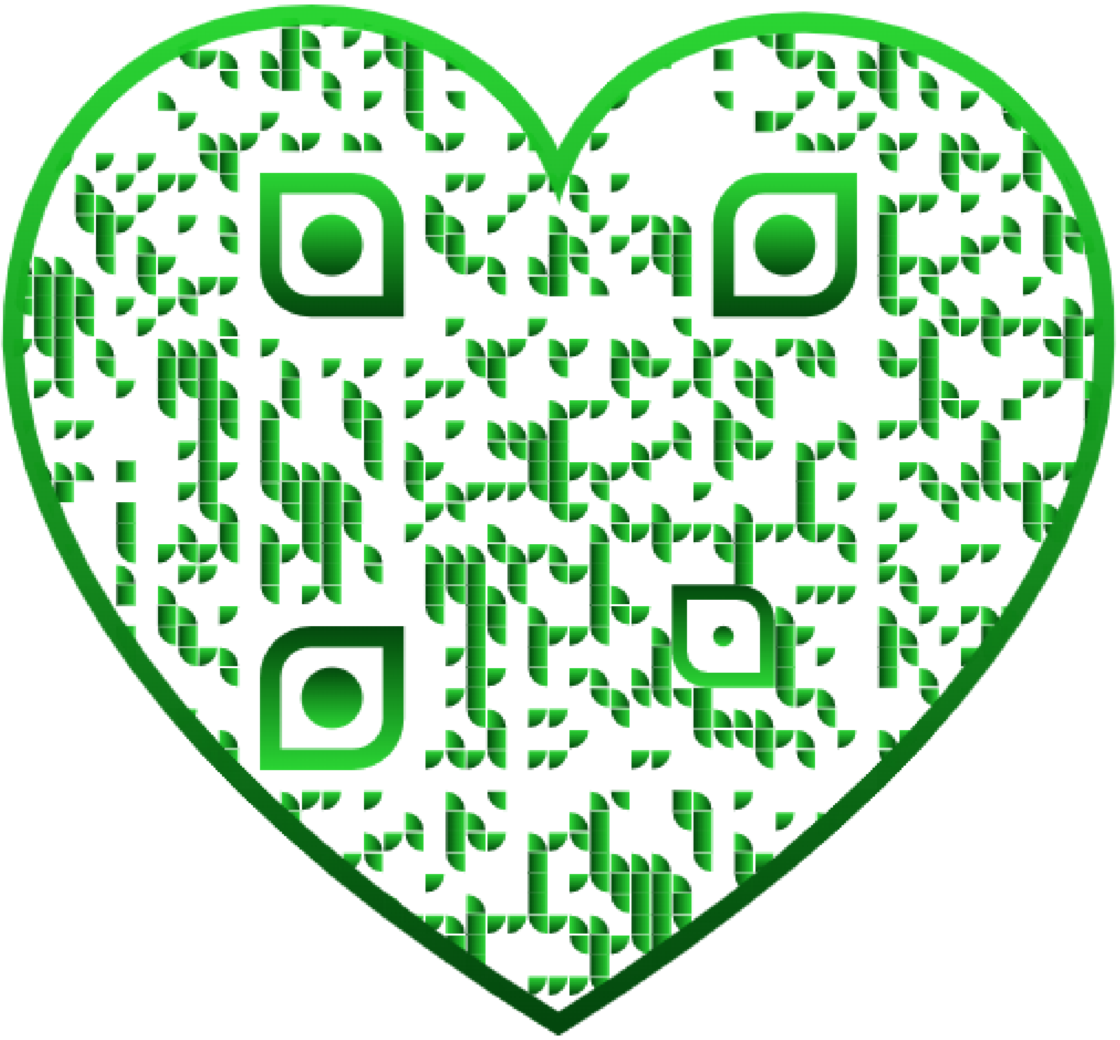

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A confession: I got into Kiss late. It was 1987, and I'd just seen the video for their new single, the fizzing, poptastic *Crazy Crazy Nights*, on some long-forgotten late night TV music show. Even as a young teenager just getting into rock music, their reputation preceded them. Kiss were the dudes with the make-up and the flashbombs and the tongues and the blood-spitting anthems about rock'n'rolling all nite and partying every day. This couldn't have been them. Could it?

Turns out it was. No one – not even Gene Simmons – would claim that *Crazy Crazy Nights* is the greatest Kiss song, but it was enough for me. I was hooked. I dived deep into their older stuff, spooling back to the great records of the 70s – *Destroyer, Hotter Than Hell, Love Gun, Alive!*… the albums on which the entire Kiss legend is built. And suddenly everything started to make sense.

Like the Cadillac and Coca Cola, Kiss are a great American icon (or four great American icons, if you prefer). These stackheeled superheroes busted out of the New York club scene to build the greatest empire music has ever seen. You could listen to their albums while eating from the Kiss lunchbox, playing the Kiss pinball machine or, thanks to the Kiss condom, getting your Uh! All Night on. And then when it's all done, there's the Kiss coffin to carry you away to the great Firehouse in the sky.

But as Gene himself admits, all of that would have been nothing without the music. Kiss aren't the cleverest or most sophisticated band around. They're not reinventing the wheel or changing the world or winning any prizes for poetry. But the songs they've written since they exploded into life back in the multi-coloured swirl of the early 70s stand among the greatest songs in the history of rock'n'roll, anthems of love, lust, rebellion and rock'n'roll that have soundtracked millions of lives the world over.

We've brought all of that together in this special collection of exclusive interviews and features taken from the pages of *Classic Rock* magazine and beyond. Inside, you'll find the stories behind the landmark albums and the greatest songs, as well as thoughts of Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Tommy Thayer, Eric Singer, Ace Frehley and Peter Criss. So bust out the panstick, fire up the flashbombs and get ready to rock'n'roll all nite…

Dave

Dave Everley,
Editor

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First Kiss: (from left) Ace Frehley, Paul Stanley, Peter Criss and Gene Simmons

TOM HILL/GETTY

"WE LOOKED LIKE FOUR GUYS IN DRAG. GENE LOOKED LIKE A TRANSVESTITE, PAUL LOOKED LIKE SOME WHORE AND ACE LOOKED LIKE SHIRLEY MACLAINE..."

WORDS: KEN SHARP

On January 30, 1973 Kiss performed their first concert at a seedy hole in the wall in Queens, New York called Coventry. Tickets were a few bucks and they were lucky if a few people showed up. Inside this ratty club Kiss first came alive on stage. Their mission was simple – they wanted to conquer the world. In 2008, on the 35th anniversary of that momentous night, *Classic Rock* looked back at 1973, the historic first year in Kisstory…

Rising from the ashes of Wicked Lester, singer Paul Stanley and bassist Gene Simmons formulated ideas for a group that would combine the musical muscle of Slade, Humble Pie and The Who with the theatrics of Alice Cooper and The Crazy World of Arthur Brown. Placing a 'Musicians Wanted' ad in the August 31, 1972 issue of Rolling Stone *magazine ('EXPD. ROCK & roll drummer looking for orig. grp. doing soft & hard music'), drummer Peter Criss was the first to join.*

PETER CRISS: Gene called me while I was having a wild party at my house and drinking Mateus wine, and he gave me this whole spiel, "Do I dress good? Is my hair long?" I had the newest velvets and satins because I had just gotten back from my honeymoon in England and Spain. So I went down to Electric Lady Studios.

I was wearing one of my coolest outfits, gold satin pants and turquoise boots – I looked like Jimi Hendrix's brother. I pass by these two guys leaning against a car wearing their mod shirts.

I didn't even give them a second look. I went inside and asked for a Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley, and the guy said they were waiting outside. I look out the window and think, "Nah, that can't be them!" These are the guys who asked me if I was a wild dresser? They looked like bums.

PAUL STANLEY: Peter asked us to come see him play with a band he was playing with at the King's Lounge. He really had that sense that he was playing Madison Square Garden rather than a small dive in Brooklyn. I'm not sure Peter was initially what we were looking for in terms of style. But we wound up adapting our writing and our sound to work more with his style.

LYDIA CRISS: Peter, Gene and Paul got together as a trio in the fall of '72. They rehearsed for a few months before finding Ace.

BOBBY McADAMS: They rehearsed at a loft on 10 East 23rd Street above a bar called Live Bait.

PAUL STANLEY: We rehearsed constantly. We wanted to have a certain level of proficiency before we played for a paying audience.

BOBBY McADAMS: One day in December of '72 I brought the *Village Voice* to Ace's house and I left it there. He saw an ad in there about a band looking for a guitar player with stage presence.

PETER CRISS: We must've auditioned close to 60 guys.

ACE FREHLEY: My Mom drove me to the audition with my 50 watt Marshall amp in the family's big Cadillac. I was in such a rush I put on one orange and one red sneaker by accident. Before I went upstairs, I quickly chugged two 16-ounce cans of beer to relax.

BOBBY McADAMS: He walked in, stumbled and tripped. He was a real klutz. They thought he was a freak. He was a very weird-looking guy.

GENE SIMMONS: Paul and I looked at each other when we played *Deuce* and Ace started soloing. We finally heard the sound.

ACE FREHLEY We jammed for a few more songs and then they said, "We like the way you play a lot. We'll call you."

PAUL STANLEY: Ace belonged in the band. He was the missing piece, the missing link. I remember it being a defining moment. Musically it was a very compatible yet combustible mix.

Cast Of Characters
(in alphabetical order)

BILL AUCOIN
Kiss manager, 1973-1982

JOYCE BIAWITZ
Kiss co-manager, 1973-82

LYDIA CRISS
Peter's then wife

PETER CRISS
Drummer, Kiss

SEAN DELANEY
Kiss road manager/ choreographer

ACE FREHLEY
Guitarist, Kiss

KENNY KERNER
Co-producer, Kiss's debut

EDDIE KRAMER
Kiss demo producer

LEW LINET
Kiss's first manager

BOBBY MCADAMS
Kiss roadie

JOEY RAMONE
Vocalist, The Ramones

GENE SIMMONS
Bassist, Kiss

PAUL STANLEY
Singer, Kiss

PAUL SUB
Owner, Coventry Club

RICHIE WISE
Co-producer, Kiss's debut

ACE FREHLEY: The one thing that pissed me off was the ad in the *Village Voice* said 'guitar player wanted for band with recording contract'. It turned out there was no recording contract. But I felt the guys were as serious as I was about putting together a theatrical rock group and I liked the music.

By December '73, the original line-up of Kiss was had solidified. But in the beginning, Kiss were more Clark Kents than comic book superheroes, not yet fully transformed into the world-beating band we know today. It would take months of trial and error before Superman was ready to walk out of that phone booth.

PETER CRISS: We copied a lot of things. A lot of our ideas, the art of what we did, came from The Beatles, Alice Cooper, The New York Dolls. We went to see an Alice Cooper concert and I'll never forget it. Gene and I kind of looked at one another and said, "Wow, this guy is really good!" We got back to our loft that night and said, "Wait a minute, what if there was four Alice Coopers?" We thought the idea was pretty hot, and we became the characters we are today.

GENE SIMMONS: When we first toyed with the idea of make-up it happened very fast. Paul and I bought two four-foot mirrors for $15. As we leaned them up against the wall, they bent slightly. When we looked at our faces in the mirror we had this freak-house look. We hadn't yet put on the whiteface except me. I plunged into it all the way. It was cathartic. For the rest of the guys it was like, "Let's play dress up and be in a band."

Park life: the band meet their public in New York.

On January 30, 1973, Kiss performed their first show ever at Coventry in Queens, New York.

PAUL SUB: Coventry opened in the early 70s. It was located on Queens Boulevard and 47th Street in Queens. I renamed it Coventry after a town in England.

PAUL STANLEY: When we played Coventry, it was called Popcorn, and they were trying to change their image. It was a perfect relationship in that we brought in a certain New York credibility to the club so other bands started coming across the water and playing there too. Years later that I found out that the big tall guy watching us in the back with the specs on was Joey Ramone.

JOEY RAMONE: I was at their first show ever. Kiss and The Ramones both grew up in Queens. At the time I think they were the loudest band I ever heard. They were fun and had great songs. I saw them when they first started out and they just had dry ice. This was way before their image and show came together.

GENE SIMMONS: Paul did the artwork for our concert ads and placed them in the *Village Voice*.

PAUL STANLEY: One of our early ads had a drawing I did of a naked girl. I knew if anything was going to get someone's attention it would be a naked girl. Sex always sells – whether it's rock'n'roll or toothpaste. It was very funny because the *Village Voice*, the progressive paper in New York, made me put a bathing suit on the girl. It ran once with the naked girl and the second time it got masked.

GENE SIMMONS: I was always the asshole who decided to pick up the phone and bother people and get us to where we wanted to go.
On my way into work I used to pass by this club in Queens. I got the manager on the phone and started selling. I said, "We've got a band called Wicked Lester. You should book us because we're terrific." So he agreed to put us on for three nights during the middle of the week when nobody went there. That first night we changed the name of the band from Wicked Lester to Kiss.

ACE FREHLEY: I wanted to call the group Fuck, but Paul thought Kiss was better suited for the press and we agreed. I came up with the idea for the Kiss logo with a felt tip. Paul cleaned up my artwork with a rapidograph pen – he always had steadier hands.

PAUL STANLEY: Ace came up with the initial design of the logo, it was a great idea but it wasn't a fully realised design so I turned it into something more like a car emblem.

GENE SIMMONS: One of Ace's friends took the photo [on p58] in the staircase at our loft on 10 East 23rd Street. The early photos of us didn't have the Kiss make-up on. It looks like I have silver hair in the photo but it was grey colour spray. We didn't know who we were at the time but we knew we had the musical goods. That photo showed us looking like a New York glitter band. Everyone was pouting their lips and doing that kind of, "Look at me, I'm neither straight or gay." The androgynous thing. We blew up the photo into a poster about three feet high, which was put into the window of the club.

"I wanted to call the group Fk, but Paul thought Kiss was better..."**

Paul and Gene: the non-toxic twins.

GETTY X2

PETER CRISS: We looked like four guys in drag. Gene looks like a transvestite, Paul looks like some whore and Ace looked like Shirley MacLaine.

PAUL STANLEY: The make-up was always basically the same, but what was on my eye kept changing.

ACE FREHLEY: People don't know that I designed Paul's make-up. Paul's original makeup was a circle around his eye. I said, "Why don't you do a star instead of that, that looks retarded."

GENE SIMMONS: That night at Coventry, I wore a sailor suit for the first show.

ACE FREHLEY: I started laughing the other day 'cause I saw an old photo from that time period and Gene was wearing a shirt with a silver skull and crossbones and I was wearing a shirt with silver wings and I realised that my Mom had sewn both of those shirts by hand.

PAUL SUB: Nobody knew Kiss at the time, they didn't have a following.

PETER CRISS: Nobody was there. It was a nightmare. We killed ourselves for six people.

GENE SIMMONS: We played a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and were paid $30.

LYDIA CRISS: The only people who showed up at that first Coventry show were me, Jan Walsh, who was Gene's girlfriend at the time, and her friend plus the road crew – Eddie Solan, Joey Criscuola, Peter's brother, and Bobby McAdams -- and the people who worked at the club.

LEW LINET: Coventry was a toilet. Those gigs were awful. Nobody liked them, nobody clapped.

LYDIA CRISS: Even though there wasn't anybody there they weren't discouraged. The band made $30 that night but all the money went to the road crew.

In March of 1973, the band entered New York City's Electric Lady Studios and recorded a five-song demo with producer Eddie Kramer of Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin fame.

PAUL STANLEY: The studio owed Gene and I some money and we said, "Give us some time in the studio and get Eddie Kramer to produce our demo."

EDDIE KRAMER: We recorded it in Studio B, which is a very small studio. We did it very quickly in a matter of a couple of days. To this day Gene and Paul and Ace think it's one of the best things they've ever done. The demo has five songs – *Deuce, Cold Gin, Strutter, Watching You* and *Black Diamond*.

ACE FREHLEY: The original demo is much more relaxed than the actual album.

On August 10, 1973, veteran TV director Bill Aucoin walked into the Crystal Room at the Hotel Diplomat and saw Kiss perform for the very first time.

BILL AUCOIN: Kiss was sending me notes every week saying, "Would you come to see us?" and there would be a hand-painted pass to the Diplomat Hotel. Their show wasn't really that elaborate at that point but I loved it. They had the red beacons, a couple of amps. They wore jeans, no one could afford leather. The show was just a pretty regular rock'n'roll show except they had spontaneity.

GENE SIMMONS: When we came off the stage after our Diplomat performance, Bill cornered me. I still had my makeup on. As soon I saw him, I motioned for a girl that I had just seen the night before. She was dressed very sexy and she came and sat on my lap. While he was talking to me I was bouncing her up on my leg for effect so that he thought, "My God, something's going on!" He was very enticed by us and he was the one who pitched to manage us.

BILL AUCOIN: The guy who came with me to see the Diplomat show thought I was out of my mind. He said, "You've flipped, you're not going to do this!"

PETER CRISS: Bill Aucoin was like our Brian Epstein. He was a force. He was very bright, dressed immaculate and had a great way around people.

With Bill Aucoin on board as manager, Kiss continued to fine-tune their stage show and costumes.

Estee louder: Paul applying the slap backstage in 1974.

GETTY X2

BILL AUCOIN: Kiss wanted to be different so they started playing off what they loved in their own life. Ace loved space, Gene loved horror movies, Paul always wanted to be a rock star and Peter loved cats.

GENE SIMMONS: On stage, we did a lot of *ménage à trois* kind of stuff. I'd put one leg out, and Ace would kind of wrap around my leg and Paul would get in behind Ace, and we'd all move around, back and forth. When we did *Firehouse,* Paul had a bucketful of confetti that had 'Water – In Case Of Fire' on it. And at the end of the song, he took the bucket and threw it into the audience and everyone went, "Oooh!" But there was no fire-breathing or any pyrotechnics. Just a lot of gyrating, a lot of jumping up and down.

BILL AUCOIN: Gene had this 'I'll do anything' attitude. I didn't plan for Gene to do the fire-breathing. Originally I had Paul in mind to do it.

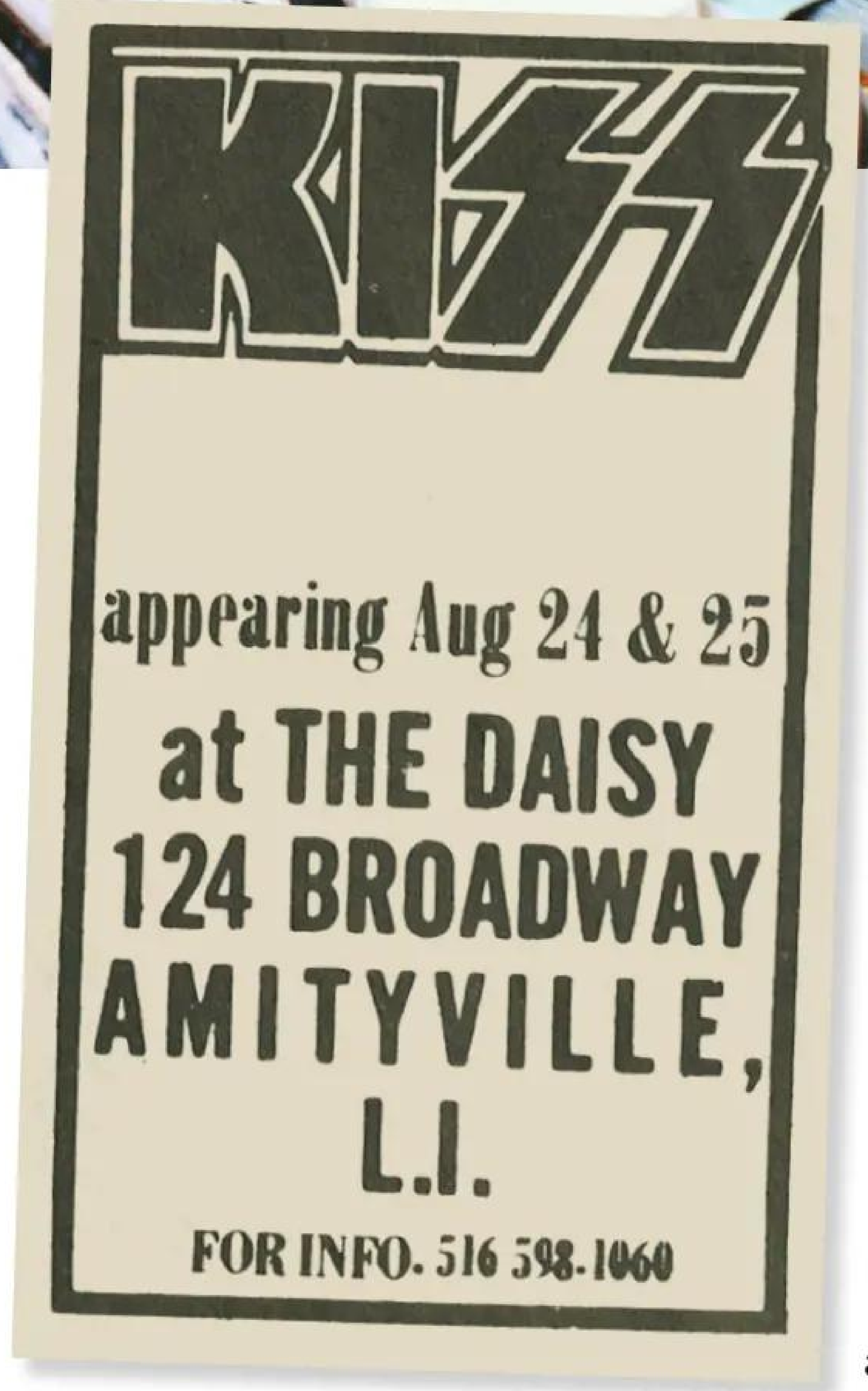
GENE SIMMONS: Bill Aucoin said, "One of you guys should be breathing fire. Who doesn't want to do it?" And everybody raised their hand. It was a negative question and I forgot to raise my hand so I was stuck.

JOYCE BIAWITZ: We hired this magician named Presto who came into my freshly painted white office to teach them to spit fire. The first time Gene breathed fire he blew so hard that he scorched all my white walls black and I had to call the painter back in.

Manager Bill Aucoin made good on a big promise and landed Kiss that all-elusive record deal.

BILL AUCOIN: I told Kiss I'd get them a record contract and to give me 30 days to do it. Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise [producers, Kiss's debut] heard the tape and told Neil [Bogart, then head of Buddah Records], "Come on Neil, sign them."

KENNY KERNER: I used to go to Neil's office every week or two and pick up a box of tapes that came in the mail and I'd take them home. In one of the boxes was a demo reel-to-reel tape from Kiss with a black and white photo. It looked like some kind of kabuki act in make-up. I got the idea instantly of what they were trying to do. The tape was great. It had *Deuce* and *Strutter* on it. This was on a Friday. Monday morning I took the tape and picture back to Neil and said, "This is a great tape, we should do sign these guys." And he said, "I can't sign them to Buddah but I'm starting a brand new label called Casablanca." He listened to the tape and the next day he said, "You're right. We're going to sign them as the first act to Casablanca."



BILL AUCOIN: Neil had just enjoyed great success helming a string of hit singles for Buddah Records. Warner Brothers gave Neil the money to start his own label – Casablanca Records. They were the money and distributor behind Casablanca.

KENNY KERNER: One night, Bill, myself, Joyce [Aucoin's business partner], Richie [Wise], Neil, Bucky Rheingold, Larry Harris, the Kama Sutra/Casablanca promotion staff, went into this little rehearsal studio called Le Tang Studios. The room was as big as a shoebox – the back of the stage to the front door couldn't have been more than 30 feet. The group came in and they looked 12 feet tall. They had platform shoes that had to be a foot high and the stage was about a foot off the ground so they looked like skyscrapers. They all wore black outfits and their faces were painted. Gene had his tongue going. They came on in such a demonic way – Gene especially looked really demonic – that I was scared shitless. I could see kids just going nuts for this stuff.

SEAN DELANEY: They finished the first song and no applause. Gene walks down to Neil Bogart, grabs both of his hands, and makes him clap… Neil started applauding because he was scared to death. And I said to myself at that moment, "I wanna be involved in this." Because that's the kind of balls you have to have to do anything.

JOYCE BOGART: After the show, Bill, Neil and I met in a tiny room. We stood in a small circle, the group in full costume and make-up as Neil told Kiss he wanted them to be his first signing for Casablanca. When he finished his speech outlining their future and telling them that he thought they were stars, Peter Criss fell down. He just fell off of his high heels and landed with great force on his rear. We all roared, including Peter. You might say it sealed the deal.

Signed to Casablanca, Kiss entered Bell Studios in November '73 to record their debut LP under the production guidance of Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise.

RICHIE WISE: The first Kiss album took six days to record and seven days to mix. We would cut three basic tracks in a day – drums, bass and two rhythm guitars. Ace would overdub his solos. We spent the last three days of the recording doing the vocals.

ACE FREHLEY: It was the first time I ever did a real album. We knew those songs backwards and

forwards. It was one of our best records because it had that spontaneity and that tough kind of sound. We were all very hungry at that point in our lives.

PAUL STANLEY: Recording the first album was the culmination of everything I'd worked for. It was exciting because we were doing an album but early on I thought that the sound was lacking in terms of what I wanted it to be. I don't think it's a competitive sounding album in terms of our contemporaries at that point. That became a familiar story every time we went into the studio.

GENE SIMMONS: The recording process was simple, direct, but at times we felt disappointed that the producing team of Kerner and Wise didn't get a better handle on our sound. Kramer understood it better.

Rainbow child: Gene in early 1974.

PAUL STANLEY: As a collection of songs the first Kiss album totally stands up. Musically it's timeless. Those songs sound as current as anything else.

GENE SIMMONS: We had a ball and we actually made $75 per week salary! We didn't have to work for a living anymore and we thought we had made it.

On December 21 and 22, 1973, Kiss returned to play two final shows at Coventry, before embarking on their first tour.

GENE SIMMONS: When we played there in December, there may have been 80 to 100 people. But there was a special excitement in the band because we had just signed to Casablanca. For all we knew we were about to become big stars. In the beginning you dream big. That would be the last time we'd play a New York club. We had full outfits, we had the candelabra.

Wrapping up the year in style, on December 31, 1973, Kiss scored their biggest gig to date playing a show at New York's Academy of Music. But first they had to deal with Warners…

BILL AUCOIN: In late '73 Warner Brothers called Neil and said, "Can you ask Kiss to take the make-up off, we don't believe in it." At that point Alice Cooper's records were starting to sell less and his make-up was nowhere near as extravagant as Kiss's, so I guess that scared them off. Neil called me and said, "I know this is gonna be a tough one, Bill, but can you please just ask the band if they'd take their make-up off." I went to the dressing room and asked the question. They had real puzzled looks on their faces, and they asked me what I thought. I told them we should stick with the make-up, and they wholeheartedly agreed. I called Neil back and told him, "You tell Warners the make-up's staying on."

GENE SIMMONS: We said, "All or nothing. You get the make-up and the band or you get nothing."

BILL AUCOIN: The truth was Warner Brothers hated Kiss and thought the group was a disaster. They sent a memo around Warners not to work the record. Because Neil knew so many people at Warners someone slipped him the memo. He went in with guns blazing and said, "How can you go against me? We just started a new label and this is my first act, I can't work this way." They admitted to him that they sent the memo and begrudgingly stayed on board.

PETER CRISS: The first time I really felt like a star was at that Academy of Music show. I was going, "I don't know if we're gonna make it. We ain't going nowhere." At the time we were riding around in milk trucks and beat-up station wagons. And all of a sudden up pulls this stretch Mercedes and I went, "Wow, this is cool! This is what the big guys must feel like." We wanted to make a grand entrance to the gig, but nobody was there when we pulled up!

GENE SIMMONS: The first time Kiss had made it big we opened a four act bill at the Academy of Music. It was Teenage Lust, Kiss, Iggy Pop and Blue Öyster Cult. Without sounding too big headed, we punished them severely and we knew that we had arrived.

PAUL STANLEY: We'd played clubs and now we were playing a place with a 4,800 capacity. I thought the stage was huge and the audience was enormous. I remember busting the snap off the top of my pants and being afraid that if I didn't keep the guitar pressed against it I was gonna lose my pants. There were a few mishaps that night. This magician had come up with this idea where Gene would light flash paper, which had flash powder inside of it, throw it up in the air over the audience and there would be a burst of fire and then an explosion. But Gene's aim wasn't as good as one might have hoped. He basically lobbed it into some guy's face and it blew up. But the guy came backstage and thankfully was a huge fan. Through the blisters on his face he said, "You guys are awesome!" We could have been in a lot of trouble…

Gene's hair also caught fire that night. It was early on and nobody realised if you sprayed hairspray on your hair you're basically bathing your hair in flammable liquid…

February of '74 saw the release of Kiss's self-titled debut album. Two studio albums followed quickly, Hotter Than Hell *and* Dressed To Kill*, but it wasn't until their double-live set,* Kiss Alive! *stormed record shops in September '75 that the band became a household name. A hit record and sold-out shows across the country, Kiss had pulled off the impossible and finally hit the big time.*

PAUL STANLEY: We were primed for success but it was going to take a little bit of time. I remember being driven to the airport for our first tour by Mom and Dad. I think our parents thought they were sending us off to summer camp when they were actually sending us off to a whore house…

ACE FREHLEY: Back in those days we all had lots of laughs together. I never in a million years thought things would turn out the way they have today. We were all success-driven, but to what ends I would only find out much later on down the road.

Regrets? Yeah, I have a few, too few to mention. Sinatra says it best…

"Gene breathed fire and scorched my office walls..."

"Nothing was going to stop Kiss from becoming the biggest band in the world. They wanted to make history."

Producer Richie Wise

You Wanted The Best...

...You got the best. That was the gospel according to **Kiss** as they broke out of the clubs of New York City in 1974. But it would be a long, hard slog before the rest of America paid attention.

Words: **Paul Elliott** Picture: **Ginny Winn /Getty**

In November 1973, as Kiss began work on their debut album at Bell Sound studio in New York City, it was the band's sheer will to win that left the biggest impression on the two guys who co-produced that album, Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise. As the latter recalled: "The desire to be huge, the desire to hit the grand slam right out of the box, was the foundation that Kiss was built on. Nothing was going to stop them from becoming the biggest band in the world. They wanted to make rock'n'roll history."

It was a dream that became a reality, but not without a long, hard struggle. For all the hype that the band generated with their larger than life image, and all the popularity they gained as an outrageous, take-no-prisoners live act, there was a period, the best part of two years, when they couldn't buy a hit record. The debut album, titled simply Kiss, shifted just 75,000 copies. The second, Hotter Than Hell, sold more, but stalled at number 100 on the US chart. The third, Dressed To Kill, almost made the top 30, although its big anthem, Rock And Roll All Nite, flopped as a single. It was only at the fourth time of asking that Kiss finally hit that grand slam, with their first million seller – the explosive double live album, Alive!

And yet, through it all, what Richie Wise sensed in Kiss – the self-belief, and the burning desire for fame and glory – never wavered. As guitarist/vocalist Paul Stanley said: "Doubt is poison. Obstacles are what you see when you lose sight of your goals. Ultimately you may lose some battles but you win the war. Other people may have thought we weren't going to make it, but failure was unacceptable to us."

For bassist Gene Simmons, the success of Kiss was in essence a triumph over fear. "Most people are afraid of ridicule," he said, "but I wanted it so much that ridicule meant nothing to me, so long as there was just a glimmer of hope that I'd be wildly loved and all the women would want to have my children. That's what we all strive for, but there are few of us who are willing to scale the heights."

Stanley The Parrot, it was called – the funny little tune by Gene Simmons which was magically transformed into the swaggering, sexually charged rock'n'roll song that introduced Kiss to the world. The title was not a joke from Simmons at the expense of Paul Stanley. The pair had not yet met when Gene wrote this strange song with a psychedelic sound and abstract words. But the first time they got together, in 1970, Stanley The Parrot was one of the numbers that Gene played for Paul, and there was something about it that stuck in Paul's mind – a chord structure that was a perfect fit for a Kiss song in the style of The Rolling Stones' *Brown Sugar*.

"We knew what kind of sound we wanted," Paul said. For the lyrics, he looked to the glamour queens of New York's rock scene and the mysteries in Bob Dylan's *Just Like A Woman*. And it was this song, *Strutter* – a New York story with a New York groove – that was chosen as the opening track on the first Kiss album.

In the summer of 1973, before Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise were enlisted as producers, the band had cut demos of *Strutter* and other key songs – *Deuce*, *Firehouse* and *Black Diamond* – with a guy who had worked on some of the biggest and most influential rock records of the late 60s and early 70s. Eddie Kramer, a South African expat, had served as recording engineer for The Beatles (on *All You Need Is Love*), The Rolling Stones (*Their Satanic Majesty's Request*), The Jimi Hendrix Experience (*Are You Experienced*, *Axis: Bold As Love* and *Electric Ladyland*) and Led Zeppelin (*Led Zeppelin II* and *Houses Of The Holy*). Given this pedigree, the four members of Kiss were thrilled to work with Kramer. As Paul said: "I'd been an Anglophile since I was a young teen. All the bands that inspired me were British. And I worshipped The Beatles." But while Kramer had the kudos, it was Kerner and Wise who had the connection that paid off – for them, and, in no small measure, for Kiss.

Neil Bogart, a brash record company executive, had founded a new label in 1973 – christened Casablanca Records in reference to his famous namesake,

GETTY X3

"Boo!": Gene accosts passers-by on the street.

Humphrey Bogart. Kerner and Wise had first hooked up with Bogart when, as boss of the Karma Sutra label, he signed Dust, a New York power trio in which Wise played guitar alongside bassist Kenny Aaronson, who later backed Joan Jett and Billy Idol, and drummer Marc Bell, who went on to become better known as Marky Ramone.

Kerner wrote all of the band's songs with Wise. They also co-produced for the first time on what turned out to be Dust's final album, *Hard Attack*. Their next production for Bogart – a novelty song, *Back When My Hair Was Short* by Gunhill Road – made the top 20. From there, more hits followed. And it was this partnership, between record company mogul and savvy producers, which led to Kiss becoming the first act signed to Casablanca Records.

"Neil Bogart would leave demo tapes for me outside of his office," Kerner said. "I would come by once a week and pick them up." It was on a Friday night that Kerner pulled out the Kiss demo recorded by Eddie Kramer, and as he recalled: "It just blew me away. I said, 'Shit, this is exactly the kind of stuff Neil should have on Casablanca – a legitimate and credible rock group.' I brought that tape back to him Monday and said, 'You want to sign these guys.' So that's how we became involved with Kiss."

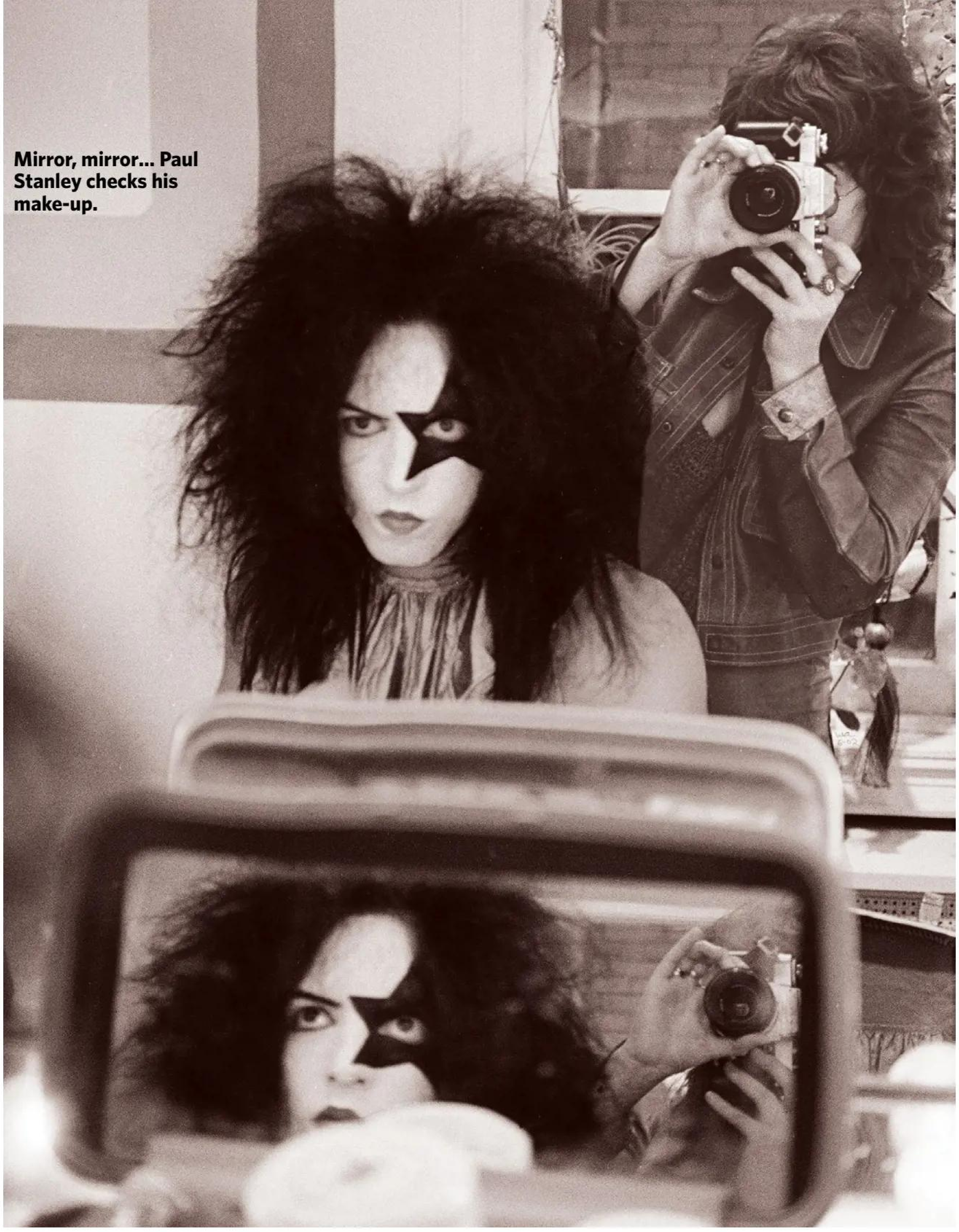
It was at Le Tang Ballet Studios, right across the street from Bell Sound, that Kerner and Wise saw Kiss perform live for the first time. They came away with a simple remit for the job ahead. "We decided that this had to be a real street album, a real raw album," Kerner said. "Exactly the way they were live."

According to Wise, the whole album was recorded in six days, with a further seven days of mixing. For lead guitarist Ace Frehley, the album had the hard edge and streetwise feel that Kerner and Wise had aimed for. "That spontaneity," he said, "and that tough kind of sound." What he also heard, on a deeper level, was the band's collective state of mind. "We were all very hungry at that point in our lives. We put in one hundred and ten per cent on that record." And above all else, there was, as Ace bluntly put it, "a bunch of fucking great songs."

From *Strutter* all the way through to the epic finale, *Black Diamond*, many of these songs would remain in the band's live set for decades to follow. *Deuce*, one of Gene's, was Ace's favourite. An aggressive, up-and-at-'em number, it was the first song that Ace played with the band during his audition, and served as the opening salvo in thousands of Kiss shows. *Firehouse* – written by Paul when he was a high school kid grooving on The Move's 60s hit *Fire Brigade* – had a slow, heavy swing and a neat "*whoo-ooh-yeah!*" hook, and became a concert showpiece for Gene's fire-breathing act. *100,000 Years* had a sound like thunder and a far-out sci-fi story. And in *Cold Gin*, amid the hard riffing, there was an ironic twist. It was Ace's drinking song, but it was Gene, a strict teetotaler, who sang it.

> **"Most people are afraid of ridicule, but I wanted it so much that ridicule meant nothing to me."**
> Gene Simmons

For a band in thrall to The Beatles, it was always the intention to have all four members of Kiss singing lead, the way John, Paul, George and Ringo had. But if Ace, at this stage, still lacked confidence in his voice, drummer Peter Criss had no such inhibitions. As a fan of legendary soul singers such as Otis Redding and Sam Cooke, he brought a little R&B grit to *Nothin' To Lose*, his whiskey-and-cigarettes voice mixed in with Gene's and Paul's, although it was Gene who delivered the risqué lines about anal sex: *"I thought about the back door/I didn't know what to say… She didn't want to do it/But she did anyway."* And on *Black Diamond* – like *Strutter*, a New York song, begun with images of working girls *"out on the street for a livin'"* – it was Peter who sang the hell out of it after Paul had crooned the intro. The album also had *Let Me Know*, a song that Paul originally wrote in 1970 as *Sunday Driver*, and track that came right out of leftfield, a lilting instrumental piece, titled Love Theme From Kiss.



Mirror, mirror... Paul Stanley checks his make-up.

Ace Frehley: fresh from another "hazy" night.

The image for the album's cover was of huge significance for a band as visually oriented as Kiss. Photographer Joel Brodsky was chosen for his work on albums such as The Doors' *Strange Days* and Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks*, and his vision of Kiss – four painted faces surrounded by darkness – was in the truest sense iconic. As Peter Criss said: "We wanted the cover to look like *Meet The Beatles*."

The album was released on February 8, 1974. Paul Stanley described it as "our Declaration Of Independence". But it was not the hit they had hoped for. On the US chart, it peaked at a disappointing No.87. And the single that was added to the album in May of that year – a version of Bobby Rydell's cheesy old 50s hit *Kissin' Time*, recorded at Neil Bogart's insistence – also bombed, despite heavy promotion with regional 'kissing contests' across the USA.

In the long term, validation would come. Over time, the first Kiss album would be recognized for what it truly is: a classic debut as definitive as the opening salvos from Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Boston, Van Halen and Guns N' Roses. But in the short term, there was no time for the band to dwell on failure. The wheels were moving so fast. Moreover, for Kiss, self-doubt was an alien concept. As Paul Stanley said, "It's like American football. You grab the ball, put your hand out in front of you, put your head down and start running forward. Anything that gets in your way goes down."

Kiss had been on the road for six months – "non-stop", Gene Simmons said – when they pitched up in Los Angeles in August 1974 to record their second album. Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise had moved their operation to LA, and it was there, at Village Recorders studio, that *Hotter Than Hell* was created in a high-pressure atmosphere, with the band simultaneously homesick for New York and tripping out on all that California had to offer.

"The LA scene was really decadent and wild," Peter Criss later said. He and Ace Frehley reveled in this environment. As Ace recalled, somewhat hazily, "It was a lot of fun out there."

But for Simmons, puritanically opposed to alcohol and drugs, albeit addicted to casual sex, it was at this point that he first sensed a division within the band. "It was obvious that I had nothing in common with Ace and Peter socially," he said. "For them, a good time was spelt 'b-o-m-b-e-d'."

The California sunshine had no effect on the band's music. If anything, *Hotter Than Hell* was darker and heavier than the first record. Some of the songs were upbeat in tone: the title track a straight-shooting pick-up number with a riff and a lyric directly influenced by Free's *All Right Now*; *Let Me Go, Rock 'N' Roll* as uncomplicated and rowdy as its title implied; *Got To Choose* and *Comin' Home* as catchy as an STD. But there was bludgeoning force in *Parasite*, written by Ace and again sung by Gene. In the band's first ballad, *Goin' Blind*, written by Gene back in 1970, the sweetness in the melody was offset by the grim images he conjured: *"There is nothing more for you and I/I'm ninety-three, you're sixteen…"*

In another Gene song, *Watchin' You*, he played voyeur over a mean riff lifted from Mountain's *Mississippi Queen*. And in *Strange Ways*, a downbeat heavy-hitter, Ace's tune, sung by Peter, an off-kilter, whacked-out vibe was completed with a solo, drenched in feedback, which sounded, as Ace put it, "like a dinosaur".

Even the sound of the album was a little odd. The debut sizzled, but *Hotter Than Hell* was as murky as the LA smog. This lo-fi sensibility would make this album a key influence on grunge music in the 1990s – Melvins, a seminal band, loved by Kurt Cobain, cut a version of *Goin' Blind* on their 1993 album *Houdini*. But in 1974, *Hotter Than Hell* was not the kind of record that was going to take Kiss where they wanted to go.

"You grab the ball, put your head down and start running forward. Anything that gets in your way goes down."
Paul Stanley

The album was released on October 22, 1974, and one member of the band was lucky that he lived to see it. Ace Frehley, always a loose cannon, ran wild in LA, and as he later recalled, in typically blasé manner: "I got into a car accident. I got drunk one night and was driving around the Hollywood Hills, driving faster and faster until I lost control and hit a telephone pole. I think I was just testing destiny..."

The facial injuries he sustained, while minor, presented a problem when photographer Norman Seeff shot the group for the album's cover at a Hollywood studio. As Ace explained: "This doctor

Detroit rock city: recording *Alive!* at Cobo Hall in May 1975.

GETTY X3

told me I could only put make-up on half my face." As a result, his image was later enhanced with superimposing. And whatever his discomfort going into that photo session, it was quickly forgotten. To create a bacchanalian atmosphere, Seeff brought in girls and booze. And by the time they were done, even the normally composed Paul Stanley was so wasted he had to be carried by Gene to a waiting car.

When Kiss left LA in September '74, they headed straight back out on the road. They got a raise from manager Bill Aucoin – up ten dollars to eighty per week. The sales of *Hotter Than Hell*, still meagre, did nothing to change that. But out on tour, night after night, a buzz was building about Kiss. As Kenny Kerner said: "These guys were superheroes to kids." All they needed was one hit song to break them nationwide. Neil Bogart was certain of that.

And so, when the band returned to LA for a show at the end of that year, Bogart told Paul Stanley, in precise detail, what kind of song this should be. As Paul recalled: "Neil said that we needed an anthem. And to his credit, at that point, the idea of rock'n'roll anthems didn't exist. He said, 'You need something that your fans can rally behind – a song that embodies what you're about.'"

Paul chose the right place to write it – in his room at the famous Hyatt House hotel on Sunset Boulevard, a joint that became known as 'The Riot House' after all the wild parties that been staged there, one of which involved Led Zeppelin's hard-drinking drummer John Bonham riding a motorcycle along the corridors. Paul took out an acoustic guitar and within a few minutes he had it.

"Very quickly I came up with the chords and the melody," he said. "And right away I had the lyrics: *'I wanna rock and roll all nite and party every day.'* It was very much to the point, and it was very primal in that it really wasn't anything that I pondered. At that time I don't believe people talked about wanting to party. It was just a one-word description of a way of getting loose. Rocking and rolling all night and partying every day isn't so much a physical action as much as it's an attitude. It's a way of looking at life. It's a mindset – a mindset about liberation and celebration of the individual."

The song was completed with a verse from a work-in-progress Gene had, *Drive Me Wild*. "I never had the chorus," Gene said, "but I had this notion of a car as an analogy to a woman, the idea of, 'You drive me wild, I'll drive you crazy.' So the pieces were basically stuck together. Take my verse and attach it to Paul's chorus and you've got a song."

> **"We hadn't even had a gold record. But we just decided that we were going to do a double live album."**
> Gene Simmons

When Neil Bogart heard *Rock And Roll All Nite*, he was ecstatic. What surprised Paul and Gene was what Bogart said soon after. He had appointed himself as producer of the band's third album. It later transpired that this was a political manoeuvre. As rival record companies were showing an interest in signing Kiss, a power struggle had developed between Bogart and Bill Aucoin. As producer for Kiss, in the studio with them, day in, day out, Bogart could keep them close to him.

For this album, *Dressed To Kill*, the band had run a little short on material, having banged out two records in a year and toured incessantly. To make up the numbers, Paul and Gene dug into their past to rework two Wicked Lester songs, *She* and *Love Her All I Can*. But as Paul said: "Gene and I could write fast, and we did that on *Dressed To Kill* – writing in the morning, and by the time the other guys showed up there was a song."

Room Service was quintessential Paul Stanley, hip-shaking rock'n'roll loaded with double-entendres. "I lived on the road at that point," he said. "And I was getting room service in any way, shape or form it came." *C'mon And Love Me* – its title self-explanatory – was also, Paul said, "very autobiographical". *Rock Bottom* had Paul and Ace in perfect harmony, the beautiful acoustic intro drawn from an instrumental piece by Ace, the "actual song", as Paul put it, another that he cribbed from *All Right Now*. And from Gene, there was *Two Timer*, in which he kvetched about a cheating woman without a trace of irony.

It was back on home turf, at Electric Lady Studios in New York City, that *Dressed To Kill* was recorded in February 1975. In the role of producer, Bogart played it smart by keeping it simple. And as Ace said, "There was a lot energy in that record." The cover photo, shot by Bon Gruen at the corner of 23rd Street and Eighth Avenue, presented the bizarre image of the masked rock'n'rollers suited and booted, Gene in Gruen's wife's clogs.

Released on March 19, 1975, *Dressed To Kill* was the band's first top 40 album in the US. *Rock And Roll All Nite*, for all its populist genius, only made it to number 68 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. But as a concert draw, Kiss had an irresistible momentum. "It just became this tsunami," Gene said. And so, a bold decision was made. "It was a live-or-die situation for Casablanca," Gene recalled. "They didn't have any hits. We hadn't even had a gold record. But we just decided that we were going to do a live album. And we were going to make it a double live album."

Comic book heroes: Kiss read their latest reviews.

They knew exactly where it should be recorded – in the cities where they could pull the biggest audiences. And in 1975, there was no city in America that loved Kiss like Detroit did. As Paul Stanley said: "We could play small auditoriums around the country, but in Detroit we were the governor, we were it! It was a very special relationship. I've said it a thousand times – Detroit opened its arms and legs to us!"

For a producer, they went back to Eddie Kramer. "I was disappointed that I didn't get to produce Kiss's first album," Kramer later admitted. "Politics prevailed. But when it came to the live album, I decided to go for it because of the challenge of making those guys sound great."

A total of four shows were taped – at Detroit's Cobo Hall on May 16, in Cleveland, Ohio on June 21, Davenport, Iowa on July 20, and Wildwood, New Jersey on July 23. Later, there was some overdubbing at Electric Lady.

"When you're immersed in success, it's a new world with no rules. You're king of the hill."

Gene Simmons

As Kramer said, "With all that jumping around it was impossible to get an accurate performance." But what he got out of those recordings was one of the greatest live albums of all time – named, with an emphatic flourish, Alive!

It began with a rabble-rousing, hyperbolic introduction from roadie J.R. Smalling that would echo down the years – "You wanted the best and you got it, the hottest band in the land… KISS!" It featured definitive performances of so many stone-cold classic songs, including *Deuce*, *Firehouse*, *Black Diamond*, *Cold Gin* and *Rock And Roll All Nite*. Crucially, as Paul said, "It really captured the live experience in terms of what it felt like in the audience. That was the whole idea of *Kiss Alive!* It was an album that totally immersed you in the show." And it was Paul, as frontman and cheerleader, who did most to make the fans a part of the show, rapping to them between songs like a rock'n'roll preacher. "It's like a church revival," he said. "It's trying to get everybody to peak together."

The cover of *Alive!* – shot by Fin Costello during rehearsals – had the band in typically over-the-top pose. But it was the photo on the back cover, also by Costello, which resonated most powerfully with Kiss fans: two Detroit teenagers, Lee Neaves and Bruce Redoute, holding a homemade Kiss banner, the vast expanse of the Cobo Hall behind them. "When *Alive!* came out and we saw that photo, we were astounded," Redoute said. "It was a dream come true."

Alive! did the same for the four guys in Kiss. Released on September 10, 1975, it was the album that made them superstars. The extracted live version of *Rock And Roll All Nite* reached No.12 in the US. Just as Neil Bogart had instructed, it was the anthem that defined the band. And in its *slipstream*, *Alive!* rocketed to No.9 in January 1976.

It was the hit that saved Casablanca Records, the hit that transformed Kiss into a pop culture phenomenon. And for the members of the band, life would never be the same again. As Gene Simmons said: "The wild thing about success is that before you have it, you can't really comprehend it. But then, when you're immersed in it, it's a completely new world with no rules. And you're king of the hill."

SHOCK TREATMENT

FROM THE METAL HAMMER ARCHIVE 2008

With their fire-breathing and pyrotechnics, **Kiss** were the original Kings Of Shock Rock. In 2008, *Metal Hammer* charted the band's explosive journey from the clubs of New York to the Download festival and beyond…

Words: **Geoff Barton**

When Kiss descended on Castle Donington to headline the Download festival in 2008, it was a spectacular celebration of their year career aboard the shock-rock rollercoaster.

Kiss's Download appearance was a triumph, for sure. Yet to the *Crazy Nights* cognoscenti, the people who have followed the band since day one, it was also a bittersweet experience.

Of course, original members – guitarist Ace Frehley and drummer Peter Criss – weren't present on the day. But their two replacements – six-stringer Tommy Thayer and tub-thumper Eric Singer – were so good you could barely see the join. Not even where their hairlines met their wigs.

Of course, Kiss's heart has always been more in Vegas than Valhalla. But for their Download show they perhaps – just perhaps – put on a little too much glitz. One member of the current staff of *Hammer*'s sister magazine, *Classic Rock* (who, thankfully, shall remain nameless) cruelly compared them to Showaddywaddy.

While we wouldn't go that far, the super-sleek style of Kiss's stage set – all shimmering chrome and brushed metal, the massed speaker stacks straight out of a high-spec Bang & Olufsen showroom – certainly had elements of a nefarious North London nightclub. (Having seen Showaddywaddy play Bailey's in Watford at the height of their drape-coated infamy, we feel qualified to comment.)

The truth is, Kiss began their career in music as a far grimier, grittier, grislier proposition. And as their Download performance progressed, we found our minds couldn't help drifting back to earlier, more bloodthirsty times…

The first time this writer saw Kiss live – in their hometown of New York, some time before they made their UK debut in 1976 – their staging was all black and the atmosphere was palpably evil. There were no roadies wielding J-Cloths and cans of Mr Sheen. Instead, Kiss's speakers were suspended from the ceiling with chains. There was a cobweb-festooned candelabra stage right that sometimes lit itself, sometimes didn't.

It was like being in Miss Haversham's room in Dickens's *Great Expectations*… yet here the old crone had been recast as a bondage queen in the throes of full-on dementia.

The house was sold out and filled to the quivering brim with frenetic fans. One boy in the front row carried a sign that read: 'Lon Chaney is alive and well and reincarnated as [Kiss bassist/vocalist] Gene Simmons'.

"SHOCK ME, MAKE ME FEEL BETTER SHOCK ME, PUT ON YOUR BLACK LEATHER SHOCK ME, WE CAN COME TOGETHER."

SHOCK ME, KISS

The crowd was ripe and raring. Then Kiss exploded on stage. First impressions? It was like a living horror movie. The music was hard, glutinous rock. The searing heat generated by the raw-as-you-like stage effects – flamethrowers, flash pots, fire columns, you name it – removed the eyebrows from your forehead and smelted your Specsavers. Smoke filled the room and mixed with the sweat from the crowd. The stench was overwhelming. It was like standing in the middle of a swamp that had just been napalmed.

Simmons must've seen that fan standing at the front with the placard, because backstage after the show the self-styled Demon was in full-on vampire mode.

"My ancestry is from Jung, Hungary, which is right outside of the Carpathian Mountains [known as Transylvania]," Simmons revealed, flexing the bat-wings of his stage costume.

"I speak fluent Hungarian and have been interested in that mythology since I was a kid."

Then he continued in Draculanian: "Ever since I came out of the womb, I wanted to suck. It started with thumbs, and sucking became a time-consuming occupation with me. As I got older, I got into bigger, and wetter, things.

"This is my dream," he cackled. "I've always admired someone who could live forever."

Nevertheless, there were palpable risks involved in Simmons's quest for immortality. Roadies used to speak of how he had been known, in a theatrical frenzy, to gnaw the wooden monitors on stage. He even threw up in a tour manager's ear once.

At a very early Kiss show on December 31 1973 at the New York Academy of Music, the band found themselves bottom of the bill to Iggy Pop, Blue Öyster Cult and Teenage Lust. Even then Kiss's, albeit formative, stage effects were in abundance and during the song *Firehouse* Simmons's hair caught fire – but he didn't notice the three-foot flames spouting from his head, so a roadie had to rush on stage and smother the blaze with his coat. The audience, understandably, was dumbfounded. As was one reviewer, who wrote: "The initial reaction to the group was sometimes guarded and often plenty hostile."

There's little doubt that Kiss began their career as a genuine shock-rock troupe, with good ol' Gene leading the way. Yet Simmons's partner, vocalist/rhythm guitarist Paul Stanley, was also capable of upsetting people – albeit in a different manner. While Simmons provided the blood and thunder, Stanley was tagged 'ambisexual.'

"I just want to be appealing to everyone," Stanley once said. "There is too much emphasis placed on the opposite sex."

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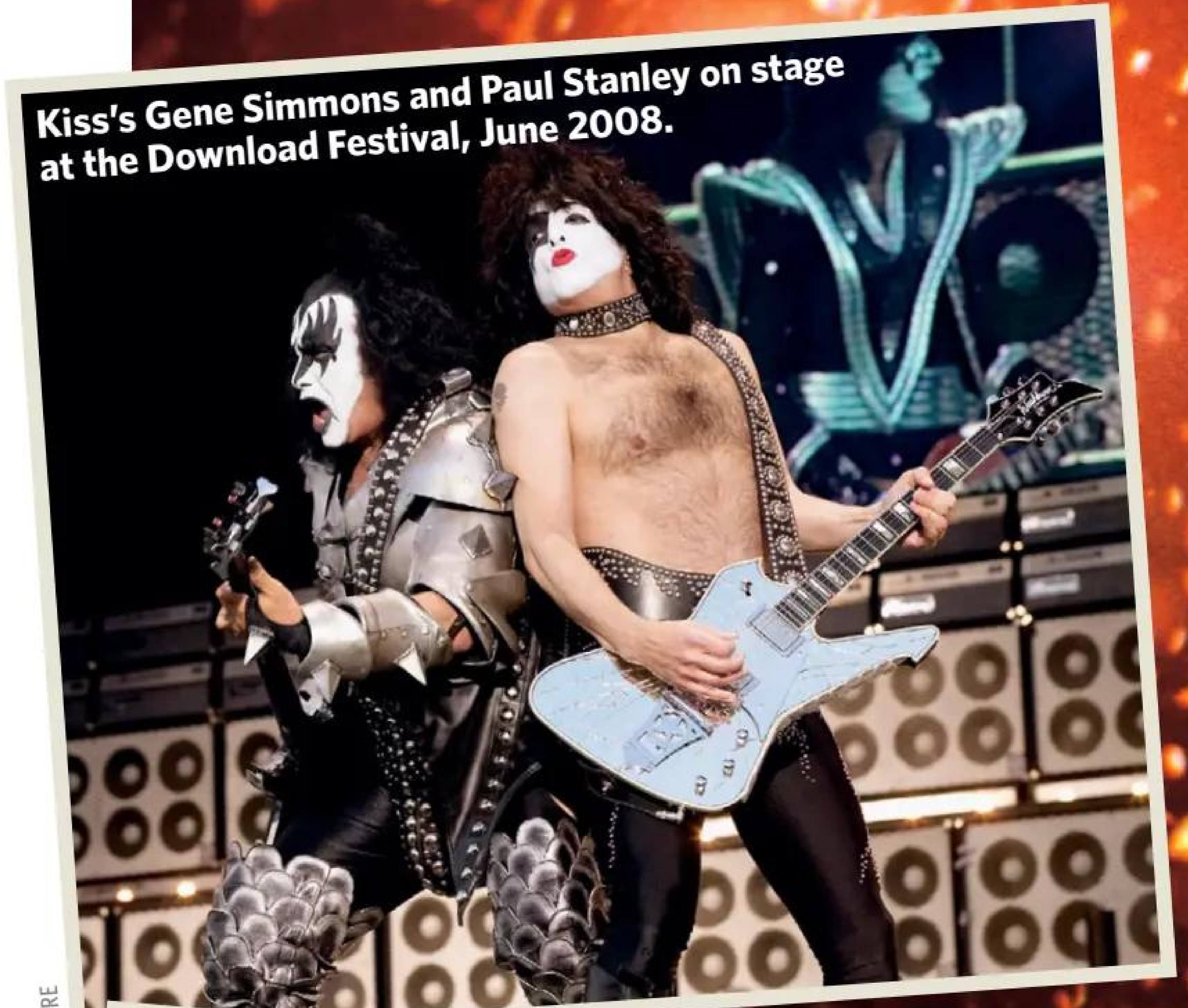

Kiss's Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley on stage at the Download Festival, June 2008.

FUTURE

Left to right: Paul Stanley, Peter Criss, Ace Frehley, Gene Simmons.

PRESS

Neil Bogart, who signed Kiss to Casablanca Records, was initially concerned by Stanley's 'gay vibe'.

"We talked to Neil for a while," said Simmons, "and explained our vision of the band, which was to go beyond glam to something else. As far as the gay thing went, our feeling was that we dressed the way we felt inside, and the gay vibe wasn't really part of that."

While discussion about Stanley's sexual orientation has diminished over the years (indeed it should be noted that he's a twice-married man) the occasional nudge-nudge, wink-wink episode crops up now and again.

As recently as 2002, Skid Row frontman Johnny Solinger recounted an experience from the band's tour with Kiss a couple of years earlier, in which he happened to find himself sharing a men's room with Stanley:

"[While on tour with Kiss] in Denver, Colorado, I had just gotten off stage and had to use the men's room," he said. "I'm at the urinal when Paul Stanley, in full make-up and costume, walks up to the urinal beside me. The bathroom is empty, but he picks the one next to mine. As I zip up he looks over my shoulder and says: 'Nice dick,' sarcastically snickers and walks away. True story."

With the ambisexual debate raging, and with cosmic spaceman Frehley and the Kitty Kat called Criss making up the pack alongside the sinful Simmons, Kiss's early image was a compelling one. What's more… no one knew who Kiss really were. Their trademark caked-on make-up gave them mysterious secret identities – much like comic-book superheroes, and much like Slipknot when they started out.

It's interesting to note that both bands – Kiss and Slipknot – undoubtedly lost some of their mystique when we fans were given the opportunity to peek behind their masks.

As Simmons explained in his book, aptly titled *Kiss And Make-Up*: "We started to put more thought into the make-up and specifically into the idea of creating a character for each band member.

"Later on in our career, when we went to Japan, the reporters there wondered if our make-up was indebted to the Japanese kabuki style. Actually mine was taken from the Bat Wings of Black Bolt, a character in the Marvel comic The Inhumans. The boots were vaguely Japanese, though – taken from Gorgo or Godzilla – and the rest of the get-up was borrowed from *Batman* and *Phantom Of the Opera*, from all the comic books and science fiction and fantasy that I had read and loved since I was a child."

Simmons's fantasies turned into reality in 1977, when Marvel issued the first *Super Special Kiss* comic book. Never a band to pass up a good marketing opportunity, Kiss went along with a promotional gimmick designed to spur sales of the first edition.

Simmons once recalled: "As the Kiss comic book project moved along, someone came up with the idea of putting real blood in the ink. We flew up to Marvel's printing plant, where they pour the ink and make comic books – and we donated a bunch of our blood."

But harmless comic-bookery was one thing. At the same time there was trouble looming on the horizon as a group of religious maniacs started

Kiss in 1975, by which time they were becoming renowned for their live act.

GETTY

Simmons and Stanley are the only two left from the original line-up.

PRESS

treating the Kiss name as an acronym: i.e. K.I.S.S. K.I.S.S., they claimed, stood for Knights In Satan's Service. Additionally, let us not forget the band also proclaimed themselves to be Kings Of The Night-Time World. There's also an alternative to the K.I.S.S. debate: Kids In your Sister's Skirt.

Where did the rumour come from? According to Simmons, it started as a result of an interview he gave in Circus magazine after Kiss's first album. In the interview Simmons said he sometimes wondered what human flesh tastes like. Later on, this seemed to ignite the whole idea that in some way Kiss were involved with Devil worship.

"When I was asked whether I worshipped the Devil, I simply refused to answer for a number of reasons," Simmons wrote in his autobiography *Kiss And Make-Up*. "The first reason, of course, was that it was good press. Let people wonder. The other reason was my complete disregard for the people who were asking. The religious fanatics who were asking these questions didn't deserve the time of day."

Anyhow, we don't imagine a band that worships the Devil would play a song called *God Gave Rock And Roll To You*…

Simmons was also accused of making satanic hand signals on stage – much like Ronnie James Dio's patented 'devil horn' gestures. Little did the critics know that Gene's sign was modelled on Spider-Man, who, in the comics, presses his middle fingers against a button his palm to fire his web-shooter!

The Kiss logo was also accused of employing a lightning-bolt font, which made the final two letters *reminiscent* of insignia used by the Nazis' elite Schutzstaffel (SS) units. Kiss were so concerned by this that when they made their debut in Germany in 1976, they altered their giant flashing Kiss sign – at great expense – to give it a more curvaceous look. Later, Kiss changed their logo on all their German releases beginning with 1980's *Unmasked*.

"WHEN I WAS ASKED IF I WORSHIPPED THE DEVIL I REFUSED TO ANSWER. I WAS GOOD PRESS."

GENE SIMMONS

Simmons and Stanley, both of whom are Jewish, took great offence to the allegations that Kiss were Nazis. Gene, née Chaim Witz, was born in Israel and his mother spent some time in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II.

But still the K.I.S.S. suspicion lingers. In 2005 a 42-year-old Kiss fan from Frankfurt was dismissed from the Deutsch version of the reality TV show Big Brother because of his tattoo of the band's original logo, which was thought to be causing offence to the great German viewing public.

Somehow, we've got this far without mentioning the sticking-out of the seven-inch tongue. Again, it's down to that man Simmons. Look… he was born with it, okay? So why not lick it up on occasion?

The prime architect behind Kiss's shock-rock approach, Simmons is now a much-derided figure – whether it's for his *Family Jewels* TV show, his appearance on *Celebrity Apprentice*, his blatant love of money, his treatment of Kiss as a business rather than a band… you name it. But Simmons remains a consummate live performer, as Kiss's Download appearance confirmed.

While Stanley's powers appear to have diminished slightly (a lack of mobility caused by a hip-replacement doesn't help) Simmons retains his stature as the god of thunder and rock and ro-ooh-woll. And yes, before you write in to complain, we are aware that Stanley wrote *God Of Thunder* before Simmons 'evilised' the song with the lyrics: *'I was raised by the demons/Trained to reign as the one'*.

Simmons might've pondered, "What is my charisma?" on Kiss's 1979 album *Dynasty* but to answer that question is like clutching at air. You've either got it or you haven't.

"We're whores," Simmons once said. "I have no credibility. I don't want credibility. I want to do whatever I think works and is fun."

And if that involves buckets overflowing with blood, then so be it.

Finally, a confession to make. This writer once composed a song called *Flashbomb Fever* that contained the following lines:

No hicks from the sticks
Gonna take you higher
We get our kicks
Seeing Simmons breathe fire

…And, you know, it's still an experience not be missed.

BRUT

KISS THE SKY

Destroyer was where it all came together for **Kiss**. With Bob Ezrin pulling the strings, the band transformed themselves from rehearsal-room hopefuls into multi-platinum gods. In 2005, on the 30th anniversary of *Destroyer*'s release, *Classic Rock* talks to **Paul Stanley** about the record that put a swagger into his platform-booted steps.

Words: **Dante Bonutto** Pictures: **Michael Putland/Getty**

PETER CRISS: LYNN GOLDSMITH/GETTY

"What's your favourite opening track on a double live album?" Whenever I'm asked that question, and it's akin to a chat-up line in the waters in which I paddle, my answer is unswerving: "*Detroit Rock City*, from *Kiss Alive II*."

Why? The roar of the crowd, the smell of the pyro, plus of course the sheer grandeur of a song that has never been dropped from the Kiss live set. Ever. Only right and proper then that this Paul Stanley-penned paean to the Motor City ("The first town that opened its arms and legs to us!") should have come into the world as track one, side one of the New York group's most cherished studio outing.

Released in 1976, *Destroyer* is of course the work in question, and for Paul, Gene Simmons, Peter Criss and Ace Frehley the pressure was well and truly *on*. Achieving success is one thing, following it up another, and this time around the

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2005

New Yorkers were following up a corker: *Kiss Alive!*, the first in a venerable series. *Kiss Alive!* had gone off like the proverbial greased rodent, rebranding the four as a runaway success.

"You know how McDonald's have a sign that ticks over every time they sell another burger? Well, *Kiss Alive!* was like that for us," enthuses Paul, casting his mind back a full 30 years. "We went from 70,000 sales to a million sales, and it just kept going."

For America's most flamboyant sons, *Kiss Alive!* was a genuine education, proving in gold and platinum currency that the appeal of the band was based on more than just music. Which is not to devalue the studio recordings 1974-75, as some of the most popular Kiss songs ever were put to tape in that period (including US chart hit *Rock & Roll All Nite*). Think of it like this: if *Kiss* (1974), *Hotter Than Hell* (1974) and *Dressed To Kill* (1975) were the foreplay, the whisper in the ear and the hand on the thigh, then *Kiss Alive!* was the moment when the passion finally peaked – it was all there, the heavin' and the humpin', the solos and the raps, the whole nine yards (and that's just Gene's tongue).

"Well, *Kiss Alive!* was what we stood for," says Paul matter-of-factly, "the embodiment and the magnification of everything we were as a band. It was Kiss on steroids."

But if *Kiss Alive!* was going to be a springboard rather than an anchor, then Kiss couldn't afford to rest on their platforms – they needed to return to the studio (the Record Plant in New York) with more than just a glorified engineer, however good the songs at their disposal. What they needed was a cheerleader and a guru. A hard man with a plan. Someone who would leave no shape unthrown in the quest for musical greatness. Enter producer Bob Ezrin.

"I'd first crossed paths with Bob up in Canada where I was doing some promotion," recounts Paul. "He asked me if I liked the sound of my own records, and because I was young and full of – what's the expression? – piss and vinegar, I said that I did.

"However, I was well aware of what he could do in the studio, of the work he'd done with Alice Cooper [Ezrin first joined forces with AC for the 1971 album *Love It To Death*], which was cinematic and atmospheric, yet still totally rock'n'roll; his fingerprints are all over that stuff, so it was just a no-brainer that he should be our one and only choice for *Destroyer*."

In making their first three albums, Kiss had simply written the songs then gone into the studio to record them, before heading out on tour. It was a straightforward process, the way presumably every record was made. Well, not exactly. In the world of Bob Ezrin (dubbed 'Bobo Earzone' by Hanoi Rocks; he worked with them on their *Three Steps From The Move* release in 1984), there was a little thing called 'pre-production' that had to be factored in – a first-time experience for Kiss, who must have felt they were suddenly back at school.

"Actually, brutal boot camp was more like it," winces Paul. "Bob definitely had a whistle round his neck. At the time, of course, we were basking in the glory of our success with *Kiss Alive!*, and we weren't exactly open to outside opinion. But we listened to him because he was, well, right! With Bob, it was 'teach us'."

Three years later, Ezrin would be in the studio with David Gilmour, Roger Waters et al helming the Pink Floyd classic *The Wall*, so the Kiss camp can at least reflect with pride that they put their faith in a good 'un. And it couldn't have been easy. Not only did the Toronto-born taskmaster insist that they tune their own instruments (which is a bit like asking the boy Beckham to wash his own kit), but he arranged them in a circle, Alcoholics Anonymous-meeting style, going through the material with an attention to detail usually reserved for the building of monuments out of matches.

"Sometimes he'd ask for most of the band to leave the rehearsal space so he could focus in on a particular person," says Paul. "He might want to run through the drumbeat to *Detroit Rock City* with Peter, or maybe talk to Gene about the bass part, which incidentally is based on Curtis Mayfield's *Freddie's Dead* [from the 1972 soundtrack to the *Superfly* movie; check it out, it's true].

"The rehearsals were long, but they were exciting, and it wasn't just the music he was pushing us on, it was the lyrics too – the 'fuck me, suck me' songs were out."

While most of the material was pieced together in the 'magic circle' manner outlined above, with choruses, verses and bridges run up the flagpole in the hope of an Ezrin salute, a couple of songs – Stanley compositions both – were already in the can… almost. One of these was *God Of Thunder*, to all intents and purposes complete, and the other was *Detroit Rock City*, pretty solid in the chorus, but still seeking a theme.

The turning point came when Paul remembered a show in North Carolina where, tragically, a fan had been killed by a car outside the venue. Straight away, Ezrin saw that here was the meat of the song, and – with metaphorical pompoms waving like mad – he set about encouraging the frontman to complete the lyric, the end result being the story of a kid who hears about his own demise (and, no, despite what you may have read on the internet, Gene doesn't take the part of the radio reporter at the start).

Given the band's special relationship with Detroit, it was only natural for that city to be spotlighted in the title, but in many ways the song is about any place, every place, that likes to pick up a paint brush and shake loose its mane.

"That venue we played in the UK, Bingley Hall in Stafford…" Paul's voice trails off wistfully, reflecting on Kiss's legendary appearance there in September 1980. It was Friday, it was the fifth day of the month, and the event is still spoken of in hushed tones by those lucky enough to have borne witness. "That place was most definitely *Detroit Rock City*…"

God Of Thunder, meanwhile, was to prove a double-edged sword for the man known as the Starchild; a great song no doubt, and pats on the back weren't slow in coming, but a great song he'd written for himself.

"When Bob said that Gene should take the lead vocal, I just couldn't believe it." Paul still sounds surprised today. "That's the thing about working with a real producer; he can keep the band focussed by assuming control, and that's generally a good thing… apart from when he disagrees with me. Of course, it was absolutely the right call, but it was hard for me to appreciate the logic at the time. I was speechless."

And it wasn't just Gene who made his presence felt on the song – the Ezrin offspring (young sons David and Josh) were given a 'big moment' too, providing the eerie-sounding vocals that really stoke up the atmosphere.

"They were wearing little space helmets with walkie-talkies built into them, and they were saying, 'I'm King Kong, I'm King Kong…' That's what you hear on the track."

God Of Thunder, of course, was destined to achieve great things, swiftly becoming a signature tune for Gene, a man for whom breathing fire and spitting blood were already a way of life. That was the thing with *Destroyer* – it was a concept album, sure, but only in the sense that the concept was Kiss itself. The nine tracks (plus outro passage) allowed the band members to further bond with the fans by both exploring and expounding their individual personas, wearing them with the flamboyance of a Liberace fur.

"*Kiss Alive!* had all the muscle and the spit," explains Paul, "but Bob replaced that with a cinematic feel. It was a night-and-day difference to what we'd done before, an altogether larger picture of who we were."

And what they were was indeed something special: Gene, the Demon, a man with a bedpost notched into sawdust; Paul, the Lover, like Casanova on a Viagra and oyster diet; Ace, the (Urban) Spaceman, the perfect companion for some inter-planetary carousing; and Peter, the Cat, a do-or-die dealer in advanced drum dramatics (or something like that).

Ezrin realised that turning these rock'n'roll heroes into rock'n' roll *superheroes*

"THE REHEARSALS WERE LONG, BOB EZRIN WAS PUSHING US ON... THE 'FUCK ME, SUCK ME' SONGS WERE OUT." - PAUL STANLEY

Gene Simmons: these boots were made for stalking.

Paul Stanley: "Get that dude in the suit outta here!"

"Careful with that duster, Paul – these boots can bite!"

Is he wearing Harmony hair spray? You bet he is.

was the key to giving Kiss their biggest record to date; hence his insistence that Gene grab the mic for *God Of Thunder* – a piece of self-trumpeting that makes Louis Armstrong look like an asthmatic with a kazoo, and musical vehicles were duly constructed for other members too.

In Paul's case, it was *Do You Love Me?*, a song co-written with the legendary Kim Fowley, and for Peter it was *Beth*, a grandiose orchestral outing that has been described by experts in the field of soft-rock as the 'proto-power ballad' (God help us). Two songs that, frankly, couldn't be further apart – the no-guitars-and-drums tissue-fest that is *Beth* and the 'living large' anthem that is *Do You Love Me?*, a song later covered by both Nirvana and Girl.

"It's a song that deals with the age-old question: do you like me for who I am or for what I have?" reflects Paul. "But to be honest, I really didn't give a rat's ass. Back then, our lives were all about instant gratification – commitment didn't really come into it. We were enjoying our success, and when it came to women, our motto was pretty simple… motive irrelevant, looks important."

With Ezrin bringing the quality hammer down hard, there was little danger of 'filler' creeping in below the radar, although the song that hovered closest to the 'f' word, or so it seemed, was the aforementioned *Beth* – penned by Peter Criss and former Chelsea bandmate Stan Penridge, and given a serious sprinkling of fairy dust by the producer.

This emotionally-charged exercise in cotton-wool crooning has roots stretching back to the early 1970s, when it revelled in the title of *Beck* – basically, a number inspired by Chelsea guitarist Mike Brand's main squeeze, who was forever on the phone while the band were in rehearsal. (Peter, for the record, was married to Lydia, who one presumes wasn't quite so receiver-happy.)

Obviously, the title was tweaked down the line – not to avoid confusion with Jeff Beck, but also to, well, just avoid confusion… "What's a Beck?!" shrugs Paul. "It just wasn't a name that people could relate to."

Originally the B-side of *Detroit Rock City*, the third single from the album, it wasn't long before *Beth* was making a major impact on US radio, with DJs flipping the seven-inch with almost undignified haste (the track was soon given official A-side status). This sleeping beauty had been well and truly roused, charting at No. 7 Stateside (and turning gold in the process), picking up a People's Choice Award and dictating that Kiss's fire and brimstone stage show would, for the foreseeable future, be tempered by the giving out of roses and the wafting of orchestral music through the PA…

Ideally, both the *Destroyer* album and the Kiss live experience (circa '76) would also have seen the fast-livin' Frehley doing vocals on a track, something the other members had been encouraging him to do since he turned up years earlier with the best part of *Cold Gin* in his pocket. Not wanting to fully embrace the limelight at this point, Ace chose to pass the bottle, er, baton on to Gene (who'd never actually tasted gin, cold or otherwise), and it wasn't until the *Love Gun* album (1977) that a bona fide all-singin'/all dancin' Ace song arrived on the scene.

Paul: "And the funny thing with *Shock Me* [the track in question] was that Ace did all of the vocals lying flat on his back in the studio. He wasn't drunk, he just liked the extra pressure on his chest…"

Of course, the horizontal position was one that the Space Ace wasn't entirely unfamiliar with. Here was someone who had quaffed deeply from the great rock'n'roll goblet; a musician with (platform'd) feet of clay whose unpredictable behaviour – accepted by Kiss Army fans worldwide – was doubtless viewed

through different, less rosy glasses by Ezrin. There were rules in place now, remember, requiring a note from an adult to explain absence from the studio, and woe betide anyone caught chewing gum in class.

"Looking back," reflects Stanley, "this was the start of a new and necessary mindset for us. Basically, if someone doesn't turn up, the show must go on. You know, Ace has got his life under control these days, I have great fun talking with him, but things were different back then. It's all been written about already, but he was succumbing to the excesses of the rock'n'roll lifestyle rather than taking advantage of its perks."

As a result, Detroit sessioneer Dick Wagner was ushered in by Ezrin to provide guitar – electric and acoustic – when Ace was, to all intents and purposes, lost in space. Apart from the guys themselves, Wagner was the only other musician to pick up a band instrument, most notably for the solo in *Sweet Pain*, and he made no attempt to disguise his presence by fretting in Frehley fashion. Simply, he was on board to do the best job he could (having previously played with Alice Cooper, Lou Reed and Aerosmith, credited and uncredited), guided by a producer determined to use every trick in the book to wring out the magic.

These days, it's quite normal for drummers to lay down their parts using a 'click track' – a digital means of keeping to the beat. But back in '76, this kind of technology just didn't exist, which is why Ezrin opted for… a cigar box. Actually, a cigar box with a microphone inside, which he would tap with a drumstick to keep the musicians as much in line as possible.

It was this kind of Swiss precision – rock'n'Rolex? – married to an ambition for the project on the larger side of Godzilla, that was the hallmark of *Destroyer*. With the band having promoted the original Sir Bob to a 'final say' position, he was effectively free to don the Napoleonic war bonnet and execute his vision with the zeal of a man whose next job was conquering Europe. There would be no holding back now – no idea too grand to try or too OTT to execute.

Forget mere kitchen-sink production, what we had here was closer to a rocket-firing washing machine, with all manner of extra-curricular elements boldly set on 'spin': choir, orchestra, car crash, calliope (a big organ if double entendres are your thing), there was plenty to catch the ear and spark the imagination, with pianos and power chords working closely together and all sound FX printed directly onto tape. A less self-assured producer would have recorded everything *au naturel* then added the required delay, distortion, etc. in the mix, but not so Ezrin, who preferred to add the icing while the cake was being baked. "So if you were to put the multi-track of *Destroyer* back up through the desk, it would sound just like the album," confirms Paul. "Everything would already be there."

For this writer, it all comes together to greatest effect on *Detroit Rock City* – which is in no way to skirt over the charms of *Shout It Out Loud* (put together in the living room of Ezrin's New York apartment), *Flaming Youth* (a title inspired by a New York band from the early 70s), *King Of The Night Time World* (co-written with Hollywood Stars member Mark Anthony, among others) and the rest.

It's a prime selection, no doubt, but I'm magic-marking *Detroit Rock City* because it provides (to get technical for a moment) a double squeeze of the lemon – not only one of the finest songs to flow from the Paul Stanley pen'n'plectrum set, but a song with a magnificent solo section that suddenly takes the whole thing to a higher level of enjoyment. Let's face it, Thin Lizzy's *Emerald* aside, there aren't too many hard rock songs that give the listener the chance to hum along with the solo as much as the chorus… well, this one does.

Hit the lights: Paul Stanley in full flight in 1975.

"And Bob sang that solo section note for note, then asked Ace to learn it, including the harmony," explains Paul, happy to give credit where it's due. "The drumbeat, the bassline, it was really all Bob."

In keeping with the mighty sweep of the music, *Destroyer* saw the band going for broke on the visual side too. Out went the old costumes (presumably not to the local Oxfam shop), and in came a suitably all-conquering new look – a look officially unveiled during a press day at the Record Plant where band and producer were recording the Harlem Boys' Choir for *Great Expectations*. In came the eager media, in came Ezrin (wearing top hat 'n' tails) and in came Gene, Paul, Peter and Ace sporting a style that I'm now going to take a deep breath and describe as 'post-apocalyptic-comic-book-chic'.

It was this look ('PACBC' for short) that painter/illustrator Ken Kelly was asked to capture for the sleeve of *Destroyer*, and the result was perhaps the most famous representation of the band ever – a magnificent piece of rubble-rousin' art, sometimes copied, sometimes spoofed (as on the Sloppy Seconds album *Destroyed*), but forever loved. The only trouble was, the first painting by Kelly – a relative, incidentally, of the equally celebrated Frank Frazetta – showed the four in the wrong costumes, so changes had to be made, and made quickly.

With *Destroyer* having done so much to define what Kiss became at the back end of the 70s, a decade that saw the band moving from rehearsal room hopefuls to multi-platinum gods, it's interesting to speculate whether their growth would have been the same were it not for the complete merging of image, music and message that takes place on this album.

Yes, the band would hook up with Ezrin again – on 1981's *(Music From) The Elder* (a low point) and 1992's *Revenge* (a return to form) – but the mojo would never work harder than it did right here, right now.

The fact remains that time has been kind to *Destroyer*, a record still very much connected to its own hair and teeth. Even the last track – a sonic montage usually referred to as *Rock & Roll Party* – has come to sound like a relevant part of the album, when in fact it was put there purely and simply to soak up some time (*Destroyer* is under 35 minutes long).

What this means, in short, is that the editors of *Rolling Stone* magazine, who recently voted this triple platinum US success the 496th Greatest Album Of All Time, should have their collective ears syringed with Cillit Bang; *Destroyer* is much, *much* better than that – recorded in two separate sessions and showing what can be achieved when the studio gods are grinning away like fools.

"I guess 'swagger' is probably the right word," concludes Paul. "The songs have a truly majestic feel, without coming across as either pompous or contrived, and Bob was just a joy to work with – the first genuine producer we'd put our trust in.

"I know that he didn't really like the title, he thought *Destroyer* sounded negative, but for me it was too good not to use. This was one of those records where – from the music right through to the name – the planets were all in perfect alignment."

Cue massed humming of the *Detroit Rock City* guitar solo.

DESTROYER TRACK-BY-TRACK

Detroit Rock City
In grey, grisly, punk-obsessed Great Britain, it's impossible to over-estimate the impact this track had on the country's beleaguered rock'n'roll populace in 1976. *DRC* is a massive cinematic experience that transports you headlong into Motown's seething, heaving bowels, where larger-than-life US rawk rules supreme… and multiple car crashes are commonplace. Get up, get down – and get with it.

King Of The Night Time World
Great, lumbering menace on the grandest of scales. Like a rusting Iron Giant crashing through a forest of Canadian Redwoods at midnight, and the ultimate Xenon turn-on for any budding headlight queen.

God Of Thunder
Despite this being so closely associated with Gene Simmons, it's a Paul Stanley composition. Reminiscent of a stalking, apocalyptic horror movie – and those are producer Bob Ezrin's kids making the squeaky *Exorcist* noises in the background.

Great Expectations
The intensity ebbs a little with this massive choral workout bolstered by the wholesome presence of the Brooklyn Boys' Choir.

Flaming Youth
Titled after a band Kiss supported in their very early days. A stumblesome anthem made all the more compulsive by the sound of a cheesy, pulsing fairground organ. Who can resist a song that rhymes *'my uniform is leather'* with *'getting it together'*?

Sweet Pain
Characterised by an archetypal clumsy Ace Frehley guitar riff. But hang on a minute – isn't that Dick Wagner doin' the solo?

Shout It Out Loud
What more is there to say? This is party-hard 1970s American boozin' moozik personified.

Beth
Simmons and Stanley didn't want this wafty ballad on the album. Thank God they relented because its hit-single status rescued *Destroyer* from the doldrums. And whaddya know, Peter Criss puts in a vocal performance full of tremulous emotion.

Do You Love Me
Containing the biggest *'BUT!'* in rock'n'roll history and a clattering opening drum sound to die for. A pleading paean for wimmin to look beyond the superficial rock-star trappings of seven-inch leather heels, credit

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In hock to the Mob, fuelled by booze and cocaine, and with a roster that ran from Kiss to Donna Summer via Parliament, the **Casablanca** label was the embodiment of 70s excess.

Words: **Mark Blake**

The rock star was hardly a novice. It was the late 1970s and he'd seen plenty of drugs and groupies. He also knew that his record company, Casablanca, had become a byword for excess. So it wasn't a complete shock when he strolled into their offices one afternoon to find a member of another Casablanca act screwing a male employee over his desk.

According to Casablanca co-founder Larry Harris, it was Gregg Giuffria, keyboard player with Washington DC pomp-rockers Angel, who witnessed his labelmate in flagrante.

"He was about as fazed at the sight as I was at hearing about it, which is to say, not at all," Harris admitted. "That was Casablanca." Just another day at the office.

In the 70s, Casablanca was home to a motley crew that included rock monsters Kiss, funk pioneers Parliament, dance queen Donna Summer and disco troupe Village People. "It was," says Kiss's Gene Simmons today, "a place for rogues and rebels and people that broke the rules."

Casablanca's mottos included 'The sky's the limit' and 'Whatever it takes'. It was the record label that hustled more than any other; that ran on a seemingly endless supply of booze and cocaine, and where everyone flew first class and rode around in limousines. Casablanca was the essence of 70s excess. But it also broke new ground in the music business.

The man at the heart of it all was label head Neil Bogart. Born Neil Bogatz in February 1943 in a New York housing project, he always dreamed of being in showbusiness. But when a job singing on cruise ships didn't last, he turned to what he did best: selling. Neil Bogart could sell anything – including coat hangers. And when sales stalled, he customised them. "He stuck a red frilly bow tie on his hangers so he could sell more," says Gene Simmons, "and it worked."

In a sense, Bogart stuck the equivalent of that red frilly bow tie on his Casablanca artists: be it Simmons's fire-breathing act with Kiss or Parliament's levitating 'Mothership' stage set.

By 1971, Bogart was working as an executive at the independent Buddah Records, whose releases included avant-garde bluesman Captain Beefheart's *Safe As Milk*, but also the bubblegum pop singles *Simon Says* by 1910 Fruitgum Company, and Ohio Express's *Yummy Yummy Yummy*.

Bogart would bring a similar eclecticism to Casablanca, the label he set up in 1973. As his business partner Larry Harris observes in his memoir *And Party Every Day: The Inside Story Of Casablanca Records*, their fortunes changed when they "adopted the ploy of selling Neil" to potential investors.

Bogart dazzled Warner Brothers' top executives with his charm and bravado, leading to the label giants offering Casablanca a seven-figure financial backing and distribution deal. All they needed now was a band.

Bogart was willing to sign Kiss on the strength of their demo tape alone. But when the face-painted rockers showcased for him at a ballet school in Manhattan in September '73, he had reservations.

"Neil didn't like the make-up," recalls Simmons. "But we had the king-size balls to tell him, 'The make-up stays.'"

Realising Simmons's balls were as big as his own, Bogart signed Kiss.

Casablanca celebrated their launch on February 18, 1974, with a $45,000 party at Los Angeles' Century Plaza Hotel. Kiss let off so many smoke bombs, some guests fled for safety before they'd even played a note. Once Bogart accepted Kiss's larger-than-life image, he helped make it even larger, suggesting an elevating drum riser and convincing Simmons to breathe fire as part of the act. ➻

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2015

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY

In

Disco ferno

The "anti-Kiss": Casablanca also-rans Angel with Frank DiMino (centre).

Village People's novelty disco hit it big in '78.

On a trip to a magic shop to buy stage props, Bogart discovered 'flash paper', a material used by magicians to create little fireballs in their hands. "Neil fell in love with the stuff," recalled Larry Harris. "We'd be meeting with DJs, promo men, and he'd suddenly say, 'Kiss is magic!' and unleash a flash-paper flame. It never failed to impress."

"Bogart was like PT Barnum in [the circus company] Barnum & Bailey," adds Simmons. "One of the last great showmen."

But no amount of magic could make Kiss's debut album sell. Kiss was also a strange choice for the man behind a score of bubblegum pop hits. "For a guy whose career had been based on hit singles to have a band that didn't have hit singles seems remarkable," says Simmons. "But to his eternal credit, Neil let Kiss be Kiss."

Casablanca's next major signing was similarly offbeat. Parliament were a vehicle for shamanic frontman George Clinton, and fused soul, jazz and doo-wop with stoned, stream-of-consciousness lyrics. In business meetings, Clinton talked in riddles (which were then 'translated' by his manager), and once claimed to have a stash of cocaine of such mystical potency that anyone who ingested it would inexplicably start speaking Spanish. "I didn't understand a word Clinton said," admitted Larry Harris. "His music was brilliant, but it wasn't made for hit singles."

Bogart did everything to make Casablanca stand out: personalised LP catalogue numbers (every one started with NB, after Neil Bogart), band names printed larger on spines so they were more visible in radio station libraries, and merchandise flyers inside Kiss LPs. But as one ex-Casablanca staffer remarked: "If it cost [Neil] three dollars to make two dollars back, he'd do it."

Within a year, the label's relationship with Warner Brothers was collapsing. To start with, Warners didn't like Kiss. Bogart talked label head Mo Ostin into cutting Casablanca loose. But that came at a price: $750,000. Ultimately, what saved Casablanca was *Alive!*, a double live Kiss album that gave the label its first precious Top 10 hit in the summer of 1975. But Simmons used *Alive!* as a bargaining tool after discovering Casablanca owed Kiss thousands in unpaid royalties.

"Neil called me in the middle of the night and said, 'You gotta give me this record.' And I said, 'I can't, you owe us money.' He got very angry and there were threats made. The truth is, Neil was under pressure. He'd borrowed money from certain people."

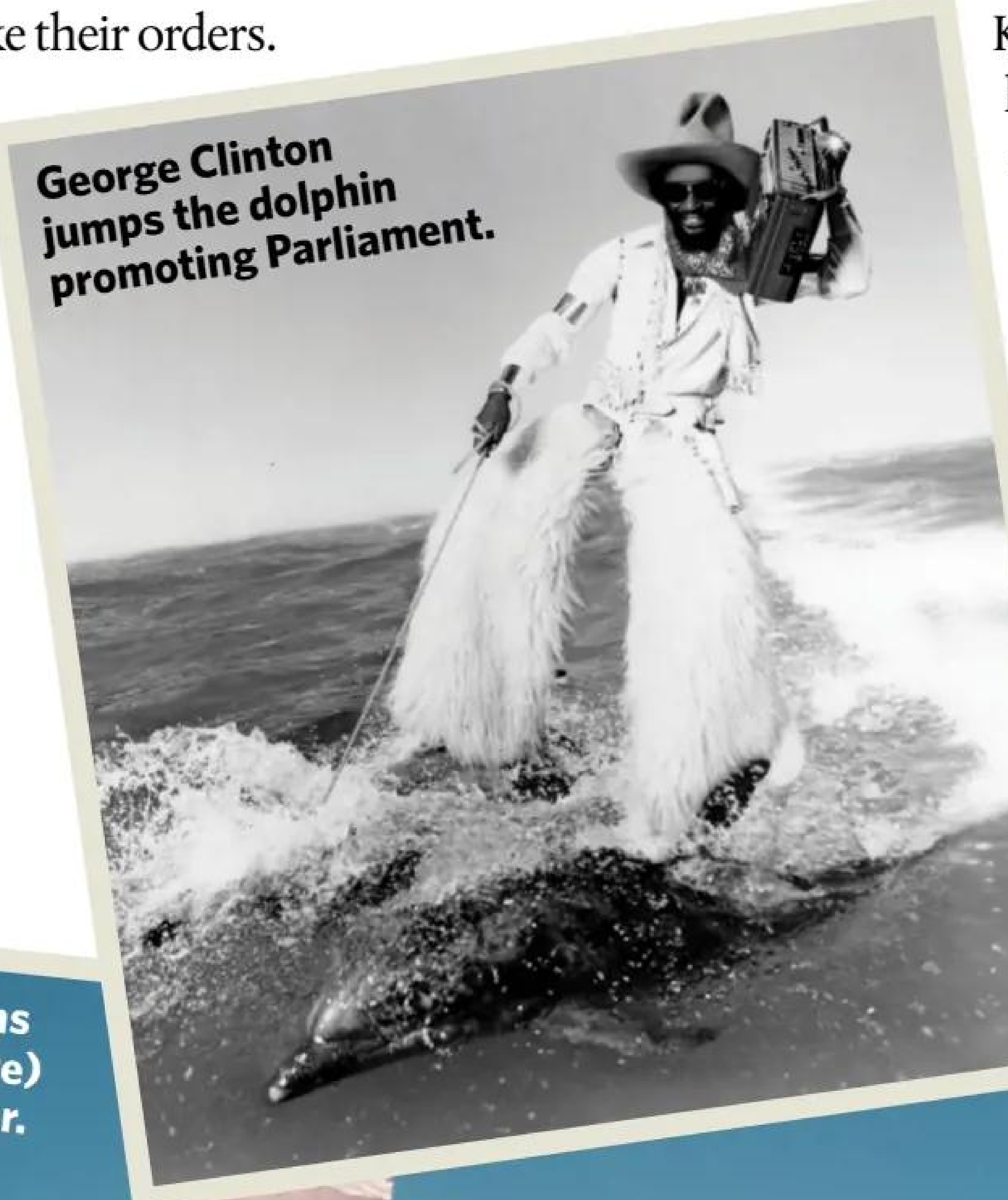
As Larry Harris reveals in *And Party Every Day*, Bogart had Mafia connections. But they were connections he was never comfortable with. So much so that when Bogart was unable to meet Casablanca's weekly payroll, rather than call in another favour from "certain people", he flew to Las Vegas, cashed in his line of credit at a Mob-owned casino, paid his staff, and then returned the money before the casino bosses realised what he'd done.

The Casablanca show went on, and was soon bigger than ever. In 1976, the label merged with a Hollywood production company to become Casablanca Records And Filmworks. Their first movie was 1977's scuba-diving drama *The Deep*, notable for actor Jacqueline Bisset in a wet T-shirt. Cue another Bogart brainwave: wet T-shirt contests across America.

Fittingly, Casablanca left their modest New York HQ and moved into 8255 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles. The new offices mirrored the desert scene depicted on their record labels, complete with palm trees and a stuffed camel in reception.

Bogart and Harris had buzzers under their desks to control entry into their offices. It was a necessary precaution. After all, a drug dealer with bad acne nicknamed 'Pock Face' visited the office every week to take their orders. "It all went down on expense reports," said Harris. "An ounce of weed was 'A nice steak and a bottle of Bordeaux'."

So much weed was smoked that the aroma permeated the rest of the building via the air conditioning. Meanwhile, cocaine was routinely snorted off desks, regardless of who was in the office at the time. "Was it worse for drugs at Casablanca than at other record companies?" ponders Gene Simmons. "Yes it was. I never approved of it. But the atmosphere was never mean-spirited, like it was at other companies."



George Clinton jumps the dolphin promoting Parliament.

When Bogart and Harris were too revved up on cocaine, they turned to Quaaludes to bring them down. When they took too many Quaaludes, they crashed out in Harris's office.

Both would be woken when their promotions manager struck a large gong to celebrate another Casablanca record being added to a radio station playlist. Getting those records added was made easier by plying DJs with drugs and plane tickets. On one Casablanca-funded junket, a New York DJ ended up having drunken sex with a 70-year-old woman while flying first class on a 747. As Bogart said, "The sky's the limit."

"Casablanca was exactly what you'd imagine a record company in the 70s being like," says Angel vocalist Frank DiMino now. "It was extraordinary."

Bogart had signed Angel as a sort of 'anti-Kiss'. But where Kiss were four distinct comic-book characters, Angel were five musicians dressed in identical white spandex. Furthermore, their blend of operatic rock and power-pop was a hard sell.

Casablanca tried to break Angel by taking the same approach they'd done with Kiss: everything bigger than everything else. Bogart signed off on a deal to hire Sid and Marty Krofft, who'd co-designed the Haunted Mansion at Disneyland, to build Angel's stage set. The Kroffts devised an 11-foot, hologram-like replica of the angel Gabriel's face, as depicted on their debut album cover. Gabriel's eyes blinked and moved and he even 'spoke'. The band members would then emerge – or not, if the doors stuck – from cubicles at the back of the stage.

"Can you believe it?" chuckles DiMino. "The trouble is, the show was too big for a support act, and we were forced into headlining before we were ready."

Donna Summer joins Neil Bogart's (centre) wildly eclectic roster.

Kiss celebrate their hard-won success with label co-founder Larry Harris.

Bolan: failed to light up the US charts in '74.

FIVE CASABLANCA ALBUMS THAT AREN'T BY KISS

T.Rex – Light Of Love (1974)
Glam imp Marc Bolan's US-only release was actually his UK album *Zinc Alloy...* with extra tracks. America wasn't interested.

Fanny – Rock And Roll Survivors (1974)
Bowie loved this Californian all-girl band, featuring Suzi Quatro's sister Patti, and whose doo-wop-meets-pop single *Butter Boy* became a big US hit.

Parliament – Mothership Connection (1975)
George Clinton's mind-boggling funk-rock concept album about a pimp in outer space was the spur for their $100,000 Mothership stage set.

Paul Stanley – Paul Stanley (1978)
Still the cream of the Kiss solo albums, Stanley's set is full of power-pop rockers and splendidly camp ballads. *Hold Me, Touch Me...* indeed.

Angel – Sinful (1979)
Angel never stood a chance on the same label as Kiss. Still, their pouty soft rock peaked here with the killer glam-pop of *Wild And Hot.*

ALL PICS: GETTY

But Bogart wouldn't give up. Inspired by the success of Parliament's *Mothership Connection* LP, he also agreed to George Clinton's craziest idea yet: a 100-metre flying saucer called The Mothership that 'landed' on stage and had to be housed at a New Jersey air force base when Parliament were off the road.

Kiss were now a platinum-selling act, but neither Parliament nor Angel were doing that sort of business. Something had to change. In 1975, Italian producer Giorgio Moroder played Bogart Donna Summer's *Love To Love You Baby*, a disco song he'd produced. Bogart loved it, played it at a party, and noticed that when someone jogged the record and it went back to the beginning, everybody cheered.

Like Gene Simmons before him, Moroder received one of Bogart's late-night calls, begging him to produce a longer version. The hypnotic, 17-minute mix of *Love To Love You Baby* became a dance hit, and the original single a No.2 hit in the US pop charts. When Summer showcased the song in a Boston nightclub, Bogart had a cake in her image flown from LA to Boston on two first-class airline seats.

Soon Casablanca were tapping into the disco craze with a slew of 12-inch dance singles, many licensed from European labels. In July '77, Summer struck gold again with *I Feel Love*, which went Top 10 around the world. "And now Casablanca was seen as *the* disco label," says Simmons.

> **"Casablanca was extraordinary. Exactly what you'd imagine a record company in the 70s being like."**
> Frank DiMino, Angel

Resourceful as always, Simmons had Summer sing backing vocals on his 1978 solo album. But Kiss's simultaneously released solo albums failed to sell as well as their own – or Donna Summer's – records. Tellingly, their next hit was 1979's dancefloor monster *I Was Made For Lovin' You.*

Forever in Kiss's shadow, Angel followed a year later with the Giorgio Moroder-produced *20th Century Foxes.* It wasn't a hit. "Disco hurt us even more than Kiss did," admits DiMino.

Gene Simmons's description of Casablanca as "a place for rogues and rebels" is precisely what attracted French dance producer Jacques Morali. In 1977, Morali assembled a disco group called Village People. Like Kiss, each member had a distinct character, based on the 'clone' look – biker, cop, cowboy, etc – popular in New York's gay clubs. Morali was impressed by the way Bogart had broken Kiss, and brought his group to Casablanca.

Village People's singles *Y.M.C.A.* and *In The Navy* became worldwide hits in '78. To celebrate, Bogart sashayed into a music-biz convention dressed as an admiral, with his co-workers in matching sailor suits. There was no better metaphor for disco's late-70s domination of rock than Angel's Gregg Giuffria catching a flamboyantly dressed member of a disco act fucking a Casablanca staffer over his desk.

But even disco couldn't save them in the long run. In 1977, Polygram had acquired a 50 per cent stake in Casablanca. Polygram saw the hits but not the debts Bogart had carefully buried with some imaginative accounting.

By 1979, though, disco was dead; Donna Summer was suing Casablanca; Angel were on the verge of splitting; and even Kiss were losing their pulling power. Arrogance was also creeping in. In 1974, Larry Harris had passed on Rush because he thought they were too ugly. But five years later, and to his great embarrassment, he turned down Bob Dylan's request for a deal to produce new bands.

When Larry's neighbour, a Warner Brothers employee, told him about this invention called the compact disc, Harris had a bad feeling. He quit Casablanca in 1980, shortly before Polygram learned they'd lost $220 million on the venture and seized 100 per cent control of the label as payback. Neil Bogart was fired. Casablanca limped on until 1986 before folding.

Bogart bounced back with another new label, Boardwalk Records, but it wasn't the same. One night, Gene Simmons found himself seated next to Bogart at a charity function: "He'd become very puffy. I didn't realise he was sick."

Bogart had been diagnosed with lymphoma and died, aged 39, in May 1982. His last 'hit' could have been his epitaph: Joan Jett And The Blackhearts' *I Love Rock'n'Roll.*

For Kiss especially, Bogart's death marked the end of an era. In 1982, they released *Creatures Of The Night*, their last album with make-up for 15 years. "Conceptually, Kiss stuck out like a sore thumb at Casablanca," says Simmons. "But we were a family, and it was a happy place to be."

For Simmons, the story has come full circle. In 2000, the Universal Music Group relaunched the Casablanca imprint. "My daughter Sophie is making music," he reveals, "and currently in talks with Casablanca. How's that for an ending?"

The Casablanca legacy endures, then, even if Neil Bogart and his dysfunctional family have all moved on or gone to the great VIP lounge in the sky. For all the booze, drugs and office sex, Casablanca also left their mark on the industry. Kiss rewrote the rules of stadium rock and band merchandising, Parliament's P-Funk became the bedrock of hip hop, and Donna Summer's dance anthems inspired the 12-inch single.

"Guys like Neil Bogart and labels like Casablanca don't come around very often," says Frank DiMino, almost wistfully. For Angel, Kiss and the rest, the sky really was the limit.

THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

By 1977, **Kiss** were bigger than ever before – and so were their bank accounts. But as sales shot up and the cash rolled in, behind the scenes things were getting shakier...

Words: **Paul Elliott**

It was in the late 70s that it started – when Kiss, the band, was developed into Kiss, the brand. As manager Bill Aucoin put it very simply: "I always knew that Kiss were merchandisable." And at a time when the band's popularity had skyrocketed – after a US Top 10 album in *Alive!* and a smash hit single in *Beth* – the mass marketing of Kiss-trademarked goods turned into a huge operation pulling in millions of dollars a year.

This was also a period in which three of the band's best albums were released: *Rock And Roll Over*, *Love Gun* and a second double live extravaganza, *Alive II*. And yet, in a review of Love Gun in 1977, by *Sounds* writer Geoff Barton, a major supporter of Kiss, there was an acute observation: "Kiss are no longer a rock band," he stated. "They're big business. Incredibly big business. There's seemingly no end to the Kiss spin-off products you can acquire… t-shirts, books, posters, belt buckles, necklaces…"

Barton called it "a merchandising man's dream, a trash goldmine." And as the cash rolled in, Gene Simmons could not have been happier.

"We really pissed the critics off by doing all kinds of things that they hated," he said. "Like having our own factories that fulfilled licensing and merchandising, all the things that respectable musicians don't do. But I hated that holier-than-thou shit. And when we started making more money from merchandise than records, I was thrilled and grateful to be getting richer by the day..."

For Paul Stanley, it was a little different. He enjoyed his wealth. "It beats being poor," he laughed. But more than that, he loved the fame and lifestyle that came with it. And this, he said, was at the heart of the album that Kiss made in the autumn of 1976, *Rock And Roll Over*. "I was really in my glory at that point," he recalled. "I'm this big rock star, getting laid all the time, all this adulation. So all those songs were about rock'n'roll and sex."

Kiss got back to basics on *Rock And Roll Over*. With the previous album, *Destroyer*, producer Bob Ezrin had taken the band into a whole new dimension – "more cinematic and dramatic", as Paul described it. And while Ezrin's genius had paid off in one key respect – with *Beth*, a beautifully orchestrated ballad, becoming a huge pop hit – many diehard Kiss fans were turned off by such refinement. As a result, Eddie Kramer – the producer of *Alive!* – was reinstated for *Rock And Roll Over*, as the band reverted to type.

"Quite honestly," Paul confessed years later, "we were chickenshit. We were scared of where had gone with *Destroyer*, and *Rock And Roll Over* was our one-hundred-and-eighty degree turn to get back to what the band sounded like live. We wanted to get the rawness of *Kiss Alive!* – that primitive quality – in a studio setting. It wasn't rocket science."

Heads or tails: Gene with one of the many Kiss spin-offs.

GETTY X2

> **"When we started making more money from merchandise than records, I was thrilled."**
> Gene Simmons

The album was recorded in a disused auditorium, the Star Theatre in Nanuet, New York. "That," Paul said, "gave us the sonic ambience of a live gig." And this simplistic approach worked exactly as planned. As Ace Frehley said: "*Rock And Roll Over* wasn't as sophisticated as *Destroyer*, but it was more Kiss."

In this album, Paul flaunted his sexuality in hard-grinding songs such as *I Want You*, *Makin' Love* and *Take Me* (the latter including the classic couplet: *"Put your hand in my pocket/Grab on to my rocket"*). Gene, inevitably, did likewise in *Calling Dr. Love* and *Ladies Room*. But there was a touch of romance, a little echo of *Beth*, in *Hard Luck Woman*, a pretty acoustic song that Paul wrote with a view to Rod Stewart recording it, before Peter Criss – having yelled, "Fuck Rod Stewart!" – ended up singing it just like Rod.

Rock And Roll Over was released on November 1, 1976, with a striking, iconic cover image by artist Michael Doret. The album reached number 11 on the US chart, and both *Hard Luck Woman* and *Calling Dr. Love* were top 20 singles. It was on the subsequent tour, in March 1977, that Kiss played for the first time in Japan, where they encountered a level of hysteria among their fans that was akin to Beatlemania.

"It was quite an experience," Paul said. "Like I was watching a Beatles movie but I was also starring in it."

The band worked at a frantic pace. On May 3, 1977, just a few weeks after they returned from Japan, the recording of the *Love Gun* album was begun at The Record Plant in New York City. Eddie Kramer was retained as producer because, as Gene explained, "We didn't want to stray

Kiss in 1976: "A huge operation pulling in millions of dollars a year."

"Hey guys, I think we've got the wrong star..."

GETTY X3

too much from where we were – we were on to a good thing."

Paul had written the album's title track on the flight to Japan, and as he later said, untroubled by any notion of modesty: "When you write a great song, you know it." He also delivered the fast, high-energy number that would open the album, *I Stole Your Love*, and a follow-up to *Rock And Roll All Nite* in *Tomorrow And Tonight*, with its near-identical hook: "We can rock all day, we can roll all night." Gene contributed a grubby fantasy in *Christine Sixteen*. Peter recalled his misspent youth in Hooligan. And Ace, on his song *Shock Me*, cut his first lead vocal for Kiss.

The album's cover art was by Ken Kelly, who had provided such a powerful image for *Destroyer*. "The title *Love Gun* didn't play anything with me,' Kelly said. "But I made them the gods that they wanted to be." Released on June 17, 1977, *Love Gun* hit number four in the US, the band's first top ten album since Alive!

In purely musical terms, it was, as Gene admitted, a familiar story. Geoff Barton said as much in his *Sounds* review. While hailing Love Gun as "great", he conceded that almost every track ran to the same formula: "Quick riff, charge headlong into the song, get to the chorus as soon as possible, let Ace do a solo, repeat chorus ad infinitum and fade." But as he also noted, this album did offer something new: "A free cardboard cut-out-and-keep love gun." And in this, a shrewd strategy was in play.

As Gene explained: "Kiss found itself in a strange position of appealing to a wide range of ages. And all of a sudden we started to get really young fans." He acknowledged that a miniature love gun was "not all that valuable", but deep down, he knew its real value as a marketing tool. As a fan of comic books, Gene had become a devoted collector, and he understood, better than most, that the same logic would apply to young Kiss fans. Once they had that love gun, they would keep coming back for more. And in 1977, that trash goldmine was very much open for business.

"It was quite an experience. Like I was watching a Beatles movie but I was also starring in it."
Paul Stanley

At that time, Kiss were already doing a roaring trade on tour with the standard-issue stuff that every band sold – t-shirts, scarves, tour programmes. According to Ron Boutwell, then head of Kiss merchandising: "The per capita gross that Kiss fans would spend at each show was the highest in the world for any recording artist."

But for guys like Boutwell, Bill Aucoin and Gene Simmons, there was a bigger picture. They were all thinking outside the box. In a logical extension of the band's cartoonish 'superheroes of rock'n'roll' image, it was Simmons' idea to have Kiss starring in their very own Marvel comic, published in the summer of '77 and hyped by what Marvel's chief Stan Lee described as "a publicity stunt where the band poured their own blood into the printer's ink."

Around the same time came another example of a product placed to a key demographic: the Kiss lunchbox. It was a must-have item for school kids all across America, one of whom, residing in Jacksonville, Florida, was the seven year-old Fred Durst, later the singer for Limp Bizkit. "I was an obsessed Kiss freak when I was a kid," Durst recalled. "I had every Kiss album, the t-shirt, the lunchbox, the whole deal. And my mom was an artist, she would paint my face to make me look exactly like those fuckers – and I'd go to school like that!"

In this era of commercial expansion and empire building, hit records and sold-out tours, the Kiss machine seemed unstoppable. And yet, as Gene would recall: "The more successful we got, the more wacky Ace and Peter became." And it was in September 1977, during the making of *Alive II*, when Ace's errant behaviour turned into a serious problem for the band.

Bill Aucoin had floated the idea of another live album in the early weeks of that year, and the first recordings were made in April during the Japanese tour, at the famous Budokan arena in Tokyo. With Eddie Kramer at the controls, more shows were taped at the LA Forum between August 25 and 28. But as Gene recalled: "We all said that we needed to make *Alive II* different from *Alive!*' His solution was based on ZZ Top's 1973 album *Fandango!* – which featured one side of live tracks, and one side of studio material. *Alive II*, another double

Dressed to thrill: Kiss in 1976. Below: Gene with *Alive II*.

album, would be split three to one. For this they needed five new songs. That was simple enough. The hard part was getting Ace to play on them. For as Ace put it, "I was out in the ozone somewhere..."

With Ace indisposed – by his own admission, out of his mind on booze and drugs – Gene and Paul brought in another guitarist, Bob Kulick, to play lead on three tracks, *All American Man*, *Larger Than Life* and *Rockin' In The USA*. For a version of the old Dave Clark Five hit *Any Way You Want It*, Paul handled all guitars. Ace finally showed up to these sessions, at the Capitol Theatre in Passaic, New Jersey, to cut his own song, *Rocket Ride*.

It was far and away the best of the bunch – a hard rock blaster, played and sung as only Ace could. But as Gene concluded: "Alcohol and other chemicals were starting to rule Ace's life." The writing was on the wall.

Bob Kulick was sworn to secrecy, as was every member of the band's inner circle. "Paul told me it would be kept on the QT," Kulick said. "It would be a friend thing and I would get paid. And I said, 'Of course, fine…'" Peter Criss believed that the band should have waited for Ace to get it together, instead of hiring a substitute. He said, in the way New Yorkers do, "It pissed the shit out of me." But as Gene and Paul dictated, the show had to go on. And with Alive II, released on October 24, 1977, Kiss had another top ten hit.

Aside from *Rocket Ride*, the studio tracks were weak. In Gene's song, *Rockin' In The USA*, the words he wrote could not have been lazier: "Germany was really neat, Japan had lots to eat…" But the live stuff, the real meat of this album, was sensational.

The intro was even more OTT than that from *Alive!* – the hype ramped up from 'The Hottest Band In The Land' to 'The Hottest Band In The World'. And what followed was a master class in rock'n'roll overkill: opening track *Detroit Rock City* lit up with deafening pyro explosions; *Love Gun* and *Shout It Out Loud* fizzing with energy; *Beth* crooned by Peter for the ladies screaming in reply; *Shock Me* slurred by Ace as if he were about to keel over, which in all probability he was; and *God Of Thunder* so full of menace, not even a lousy drum solo from Peter could break the spell.

The cover of Alive II had the band's logo and the album title writ large, and four individual shots of the band members, with Gene, bloody-faced, like something out of a horror movie. The money shot, on the inside gatefold sleeve, had Kiss on stage, the four of them high up on risers, columns of flame shooting up on all sides.

It was an image exuding power. And whatever was going on behind the scenes, it was this image that defined Kiss, in this imperial phase, as the greatest show on Earth. ❼

HOLLYWOOD OR BUST

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2007

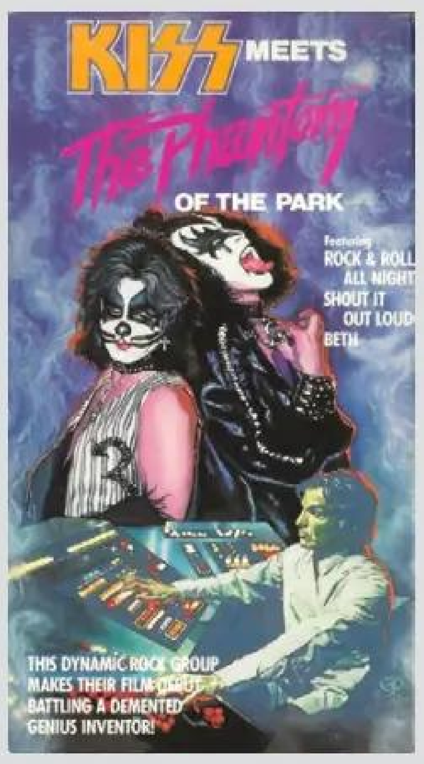
At the height of their powers, Kiss decided they wanted to be stars of the silver screen as well as the concert stage – so they made their own movie, *Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park*. Problem was, they couldn't act and they had no budget... Words: **Ken Sharp**

By 1978 Kiss were the reigning kings of hard rock. They weren't just musicians but larger-than-life comic-book superheroes. The band were a veritable multi-million dollar enterprise away from recording and the concert stage. Mining the big bucks with their newly christened Kiss Army fan club, Kiss blatantly exploited their colourful Kabuki visages, which were plastered on all sorts of merchandise, from dolls to lunchboxes to boardgames.

At the height of Kiss-mania, manager Bill Aucoin, a veteran TV director, saw that the next logical step for the masked marauders was to go Hollywood and do their own film. Envisaged as a cross between *Star Wars* and *A Hard Day's Night*, *Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park* was a celluloid abomination, one of those 'scratch your head' turkeys that now, almost three decades since its premiere, is celebrated as a must-see cult film, celebrated for its campiness, and cheesy period charm by Kiss fans.

The main problem besides the terrible script, B-level actors (aside from Anthony Zerbe) and wafer-thin plot which concerned a deranged amusement park creator, Abner Deveraux, intent on foisting a fake Kiss on the world, was that Paul, Gene, Ace and Peter couldn't act to save their lives. The immortal Oscar-winning line "Ack!", uttered by Ace Frehley, was just one of the classic pieces of dialogue in this stinker. Clearly, this was never going to be the *Citizen Kane* of rock movies. In fact it was more like the *Citizen Inane* of music films.

Yet for the die-hard Kiss fan, there are flashes of brilliance that make viewing the film a little less painful. Truth be told, the concert footage shot at Magic Mountain



Amusement Park in Valencia, California, does capture the excitement and insanity of Kiss's legendary live extravaganza. "We went out to film the concert at the park and there were 30,000 people there," the late Joseph Barbera of Hanna/Barbera fame stated. "They had their set, which was worth a million dollars, and when they did their songs it was incredible."

Directed by Gordon Hessler, renowned for his work shooting low-budget horror films, the band were reportedly so unprepared for their thespian duties that they had to be fed their dialogue line by line. "They had hired a pretty good director," recalls Kiss manager Bill Aucoin, "but when the director tried to get great scenes out of Gene, Paul, Ace and Peter it took twice as long because they had never done it before. It wasn't their fault. So Hanna/Barbera came in and they fired the director and got someone else."

Part of the problem was with the film's producers, Hanna/Barbera, best known for their animated success with *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons* and *Yogi Bear*.

"It was a television film and they thought they could get away with it for a lot less money," says Bill Aucoin.

Adds Al Ross, then vice president of Aucoin Management: "The film was originally going to be shown in theatres, then it turned into a TV movie. In the very beginning it was looked upon as a low-budget job and that's not what it was supposed to be."

While shooting the film, relationships within Kiss were at an all-time low. Drummer Peter Criss remembers: "At that time in '78, I was doing cocaine and drinking and getting crazy. I remember how hard it was getting up at six in the morning and being in make-up at eight. And they would cake it on, putting on

three or more layers, so if you wanted to rest you couldn't. If you moved your head you'd mess it all up again. And I didn't like the waiting. We were so used to getting on stage and going at it. No one told us we were going to be sitting for a long time. For me, I'm such a hyper guy, I'd go in and the minute the make-up was on, I'd break open a beer and I'd start partying."

"There was a lot of tension on the set," agrees Al Ross. "It was very stressful for the band. There was conflict on every day of the film shoot. For Gene and Paul this was the ultimate thing they could be doing, to be on the big screen. But Ace and Peter, psychologically or subconsciously, thought all it was going to do was keep this Kiss thing going. I think it was time for them to get out. The fact that Kiss's ballad *Beth* was such a big hit inflamed Peter's ego. Peter took the lead vocal on *Beth* and from that point on all he wanted to do was put a tuxedo on and go play Las Vegas like Frank Sinatra."

Reportedly, Criss was so out of control

"We had broads in our trailer. The refrigerator was loaded with beer. We were into coke. We were animals. We were just crazy." Peter Criss

that all his dialogue had to be redone by a voice actor. "They said that my voice stunk. Yes, I was stoned all the time. So was Ace. We were both partying animals at that point in our career. We had broads in our trailer, six, seven broads at a time in our trailer. I mean every fucking day, with the make-up on! The refrigerator was loaded with beer. We were into coke. We were just animals. We made Tommy Lee (Mötley Crüe) look like a child. We were fucking them in the back, the front, the bathrooms. We were just crazy.

"So I was exhausted and maybe my voice did sound like shit. I think whoever they got to replace me just blew it. At least they could have gotten a guy who sounds closer to me than that. I got so many letters from Kiss fans saying: 'What the fuck is this! How dare this guy use someone else's voice!'"

Guitarist Ace Frehley reveals some unknown trivia about the film. "My stunt man was black! Putting white make-up on him did the trick, but they had to put flesh make-up on his hands. There was one scene in the haunted place and I had an argument with the director. I just hopped in my Mercedes and took off. So my stunt man stood in for me. There was a close-up shot and you can definitely tell that it's not me. When he gets knocked against the wall by Dracula or somebody, if you freeze frame it, it's obvious that it's not me."

Another piece of trivia concerns *Rip & Destroy*, the one 'new' song featured. "We were supposed to do the music for the film," vocalist/rhythm guitarist Paul Stanley recalls. "We had no time and there was one key song that they needed at the end. So we said: 'Great, we'll just write new words to the music of *Hotter Than Hell*. I went into a trailer and wrote some words and that was that. There was only one verse to the song."

Premiering in America on NBC-TV on October 28, 1978, the film was ravaged by the critics but scored big in the ratings. Yet despite the audience response, thankfully for all concerned, *Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park* was the first and last of the band's silver-screen endeavours.

Looking back on this celluloid trainwreck, Stanley reflects: "Due to circumstances out of our control, it turned out kind of distorted and embarrassing. The film just kept going off on tangents and by the time it was done I really didn't have much to desire to see it."

Adds bassist Gene Simmons: "It was interesting to make and also it was a learning curve. It taught me that the next time somebody said: 'Don't worry, it'll be fine,' that you should still roll up your sleeves and stick your nose into it just to make sure. Because when the movie or anything comes out with your name on it ultimately you're responsible for it. So it was interesting to do, but I don't think it's a very good movie"

Gene Simmons: *Kiss Meets The Phantom* might have been crap, but it was also "a learning curve".

GETTY

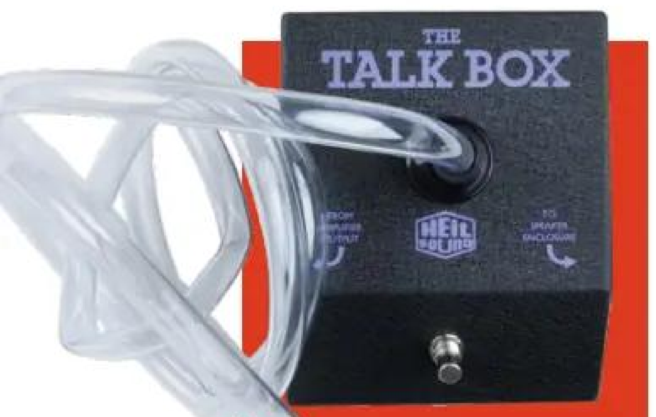
Ace Frehley

New York Groove

Russ Ballard might've written this foot-stomping anthem, but when the Space Ace recorded the song for his solo album in 1978 he had a surprise hit on his hands.

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2008

Words: **Geoff Barton**



TALK THIS WAY

It might surprise you to hear that hidden in the mix of Ace Frehley's *New York Groove* are the wah-wah sounds of a 'talk box' – as famously utilised by Peter Frampton on *Show Me The Way*, Joe Walsh on *Rocky Mountain Way* and Bon Jovi on *Livin' On A Prayer*.

"It was [producer] Eddie Kramer's idea was to use that effect," Frehley remembers. "Well, I guess I'm spastic because I couldn't do it. I couldn't play my guitar and do the mouth thing with that plastic tube at the same time. So I had my friend Bobby [McAdams, Ace's guitar and amp technician] stand there and open and close his mouth to the tube while I played my guitar. Kinda crazy. I wish we woulda had some video tape of that stuff."

Before Frehley recorded his 1978 solo album his lead-vocal work had been confined to the songs *Shock Me* (from Kiss's *Love Gun* album) and *Rocket Ride* (from the studio side of *Kiss Alive II*).

"Paul and Gene dominated the group at the start. It took me a while to come into my own. But once I did I wasn't happy about being in the background as much."

GETTY

New York Groove is Ace Frehley's very own personal anthem. The track is as synonymous with the ex-Kiss man as his silver superhero suit and smokin' six-string.

Frehley was born and raised in the Bronx, so the Big Apple is his kinda town. And *New York Groove* is his kinda song – though he didn't write it. But when Ace barks the line *'It's gonna be ecstasy… this place was meant for me'* above that foot-stomping rhythm, you can sense the native pride shivering down his Spaceman spine.

"A lot of people think I wrote *New York Groove*. It's not a myth that I've perpetuated, but that's the way it is. I wish I would've wrote the song, though. I would've made a lot more cash out of it, ha-ha-hargh!" Frehley chuckles in his inimitable style.

In fact *New York Groove* was written by Russ Ballard and recorded originally by Hello, the glitter-popstrels who enjoyed a brief burst of fame in the mid-70s. Three years before Frehley included *New York Groove* on his self-titled 1978 solo album, Hello's version was a hit all over Europe. It got to No.9 in the UK and No.7 in Germany.

Ballard takes up the story: "In 1975 I'd just finished producing Roger Daltrey's solo album, *Ride A Rock Horse*. I got it cut in London but Roger said to me: 'People say Bob Ludwig's cuts are louder at Sterling Sound in New York. Do you fancy flying out and doing a cut there?'"

Ballard, the former guitarist with Argent, hadn't been to New York for a while. "While I was sitting on the plane I got out a pen and paper and started thinking of the phrase 'back in the New York groove'. That'd be a good title for a song, I reckoned; the whole idea of someone going back to New York and singing about the experience."

Returning to the UK, Ballard met up with Hello's manager, Dave Blaylock, who asked him: "Have you got any more songs my band might be interested in?"

Ballard had written Hello's debut single, *You Move Me*. Hello had also demo'd another Ballard song, *Can't Let You Go*, which had become a Top 40 hit for Barry Ryan.

Ballard replied: "I haven't got a song exactly, but I've got this title, I've got this kind of idea…"

Hello's version of *New York Groove* was recorded in just five hours at Livingston Studios, Barnet, north of London.

"I wanted to do a Bo Diddley beat because I thought that sort of sound hadn't been heard for a long time," Ballard reveals. "So I got some maracas and a harmonica, and I started off with this 'cha-ch-ch-cha-ch-cha-cha' rhythm. I got the members of Hello to stand on some trestle tables with their platform boots on and they all stomped along. I had the chorus – *'I'm back, back in the New York groove'* – and I wrote the rest of the words in the studio."

Frehley claims never to have heard the Hello track. "Or maybe I have and I just can't remember," he tells *Classic Rock*. "Can you send me an MP3 of it?"

He decided to record *New York Groove* "because we realised we needed a more commercial song for my solo record, so we tracked it while we were doing the overdubs in Manhattan."

> **"These beautiful semi-naked girls were constantly walking into the studio and checking out what was going on."**

The majority of Frehley's album was recorded in Sharon, Connecticut, "at a mansion that was originally part of the Colgate estate – the toothpaste people. Is toothpaste big in England? Is Colgate an English chap or an American chap? Ha-ha-hargh! It kills me," Frehley laughs.

"Up in Connecticut we cut all the basic tracks," he continues. "It was just me and [drummer] Anton Fig. [Producer] Eddie Kramer brought along the Electric Lady remote truck. I had an old Les Paul, an old Fender and a Harvard amplifier with a 12-inch speaker. We put the guitars in one room and set up the drums in the hallway. There were two staircases going up. We put the drums right in the middle. We mic'd above and got all natural reverb. That's how we did most of the tracks."

New York Groove, however, was laid down in Plaza Sound Studios above Radio City Music Hall on 51st Street.

"It was kinda cool because the Rockettes – the dancers who perform at Radio City – used to sun themselves on the roof. The studio was right there off the stairway. These beautiful, semi-naked girls were constantly walking into the studio and checking out what was going on. So that was quite a nice recording environment."

All four Kiss solo albums – from Frehley, Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley and Peter Criss – were released simultaneously on September 18, 1978. Frehley's was the only one to generate a hit single, with *New York Groove* reaching No.13 in the US in early 1979 during a 21-week run in the chart.

"It didn't feel like I was getting one over on the other guys in Kiss," Frehley shrugs, "it's just something that happened. I was lucky that it came out as good as it did. I never really listened to the other three solo records, although I did put Gene's on once. When I heard his version of *When You Wish Upon A Star* I had to pull it off the turntable, ha-ha-hargh!"

Ballard says *New York Groove* is one of the most successful songs he's written.

"I guess it surprised me because it's so incredibly simple. They say a good song will always sell. And there's a lot of truth in that. I've got a few others that keep going round and round, which is wonderful. Songs like *Since You've Been Gone*, *God Gave Rock'N'Roll To You* [recorded by Argent and covered by Kiss], and one by America called *You Can Do Magic* which was absolutely monster in the US. Then there's *New York Groove*, which still gets played at major sporting events in the city – like at Giants Stadium. It's incredible."

During our interview with Frehley we mention that we'll be talking to Ballard as well as him. "Give him my best," Frehley requests. "What's he doing these days?"

We don't know exactly, we respond. Maybe he's living off the royalties from *New York Groove*. "Ha-ha-hargh!" cackles Ace. "Ha-ha-hargh!"

Ace Frehley: the man behind the most successful Kiss solo album.

THE FACTS

RELEASE DATE
November 1978

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
US No.13
Ace didn't chart in the UK. However, Hello's version reached No.9 in Britain in 1975.

PERSONNEL
Ace Frehley
Vocals, guitar, bass
Anton Fig
Drums

PRODUCER
Eddie Kramer

WRITTEN BY
Russ Ballard

LABEL
Casablanca

FACT
New York Groove contains the first ever 'rock rap', according to Russ Ballard: "There's this spoken part in it that goes: *'Here I am again in the city/With a fistful of dollars/And baby, you better believe…'* And this was back in the 70s. The song was ahead of its time."

FACE OFF

SAM CHIVERS/MAGIC TORCH

A decade of identity crises witnessed the exits of Ace Frehley and Peter Criss, a disastrous concept album, rising tensions between Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley, and – most shocking of all – the removal of their make-up. Would Kiss even survive the 1980s? Silly question. With the help of MTV and a new melodic-rock direction, of *course* they would...

Words: **Dave Everley**

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2012

Behind the mask: two sides of guitarist Paul Stanley, as the Starchild struggled to keep Kiss afloat amid dissension and disinterest within the group's ranks.

In the annals of 20th-century history, Sunday September 18, 1983, will go down as being about as uneventful as it gets. In the Caribbean, the islands of St Kitts and Nevis finally gained their independence after two centuries of British rule. In Alaska, long-distance walker George Meegan completed a six-year-treak that took him from one end of the Western Hemisphere to the other. Across America, transistor radios rattled and legwarmers twitched to Michael Sembello's dancefloor 'smash' *Maniac*, the No.1 single in the Billboard charts.

Only in a small studio deep in the bowels of MTV's New York HQ was something monumental happening. There, the four members of Kiss – those pansticked titans of glitter-metal – were about reveal their faces to the world for the first time in their 10-year-career. Stripped of warpaint and free of flashbombs, and under unforgiving studio lights, these great American icons were ready for their close-up.

Watch the footage on YouTube now, and it's a strangely solemn experience. In the hushed studio, MTV 'VJ' J.J. Jackson introduces the band in a fathomlessly deep voice as, one by one, images of each of them flash on screen. First up is Vinnie Vincent ("Lead guitarist and co-writer of many of the songs on the current Kiss album," intones Jackson with near-Biblical gravitas). Next up, drummer Eric Carr ("He has been with the band since 1979, and Kiss is, by the way, the very first band that Eric has ever been with"). Then it's the turn of Paul Stanley ("Lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist and co-founder of the group"). Finally, Gene Simmons ("Bass, also co-founder of Kiss, he is the fire-breathing, blood-spitting monster of Kiss"). At each beat, the shot of the made-up band member vanishes, replaced by an image of them live from the studio floor: Vincent looking vacant, Carr coquettish, Stanley glowering, Simmons smirking. This, ladies and gentlemen and creatures of the night, is Kiss as naked as the day they were born.

This was a very different kind of theatrics from the band who made their name as rock's greasepainted Gods Of Thunder. But for all the hooplah, it was been born out of necessity. The huge successes of the 70s were an increasingly distant memory, and the failure of their most recent albums had found them floundering in a new musical world, unsure of who they were and where they were going. Taking off the make-up was the very last (space) ace up their sleeve. This was make or break!

"It had really run its course," says Paul Stanley today. "It was no longer the original images. We had a fox and we had an Egyptian guy. Maybe next we'd have Turtle Boy. It was becoming farcical. We needed to take a stand. If we were good enough and viable enough as a band, we would survive. And ⋙

KISS'S KRAZY KRAZY DEKADE

1980

UNMASKED

CASABLANCA

In which Kiss embraced their inner AOR-ness with a vengeance. Stanley's *Shandi* remains a consummate weepie, while *Tomorrow* set the arena roofs rattling.

Still strutting as the decade opens: (*l-r*) Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley, new drummer Eric Carr.

EUGENE ADEBARI/REX FEATURES

if not, we would meet the extinction we deserved."

Kiss's grand unmasking would be a tipping point in the most torrid decade of their career. Before it, they were heading platform boot-ward towards extinction. Afterwards, they slowly but surely regained their status as one of America's pre-eminent rock'n'roll bands with a canon of towering 80s records that stood steel-clawed toecap to steel-clawed toecap with everything they'd done before, and helped lead MTV's rock revolution. Sure, albums like *Lick It Up* and *Asylum* might not have had the boot-in-the-balls impact of Kiss's 70s heyday, but at its very best, their 80s output stands among the finest melodic rock that the era produced. And it was made as Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons were fighting for the very soul of Kiss.

"We became victims of our own fame," says Stanley now. "We lost the hunger, lost the passion, lost focus. We became more concerned with trying to get the approval of our peers as opposed to maintaining our connection to the fans. We became swallowed up by our success."

Gene Simmons puts it more bluntly.

"For me," says the sometime God Of Thunder, "the 80s was miserable."

Kiss had exited the 70s on a high, at least professionally. The disco dust-sprinkled *I Was Made For Loving You* had given them one of their biggest hits, albeit to the disgust of some of their rockier fans who saw it – quite rightly – as a shameless attempt to keep up with the times.

As Paul Stanley steeled himself to enter the new decade, he had a lot on his mind. "There was a reorganizing of my thoughts about what the band was and what it would be," he says now. "I quickly went from thinking that we were the four musketeers, that it was all for one and one for all, to 'What do we do now?' When certain people aren't pulling their weight and sabotaging what you want to do. In plain English, just wanting to fuck things up."

"Both Ace Frehley and Peter Criss wanted to leave the band," says Gene Simmons, cutting to the chase. "And the manager decided that we should do solo records to keep the band together: 'They're solo records, but they'll be Kiss records too,' he said. 'You'll have your cake and eat it.' Ace and Peter, fucking idiots to this day, poor guys."

In theory, the ploy of releasing four musically schizophrenic solo records on the same day in 1978 should have been a stroke of genius. Instead, it backfired massively, with each record shifting a fraction of what regular Kiss record would normally sell and leaving at least half the band facing a serious rethink as they entered New York's Electric Ladyland Studio to record their next album as a group, *Dynasty*.

"You have to start saying, 'What now?'," says Stanley. "And it became real clear that we couldn't stop the band for one person. Certainly, my love of the band wasn't going to allow it to stop."

They didn't know it at the time, but *Dynasty* would become the band's most controversial album yet. In an attempt to cut ties with the past and move forward, the band had roped in producer Vini Poncia – a man whose CV included Peter Criss's lounge-jazz and R&B influenced solo album, as well as albums by *Wonder Woman* star Lynda Carter and curly-haired popstrel Leo Sayer.

"I don't know if it was Vini's intention, or the band's intention, but they wanted to explore the vocals and the harmonies," says *Dynasty* engineer Jay Messina, who had first worked with the band on 1976's earthshaking *Destroyer* alongside producer Bob Ezrin. "The more musical aspect of the band. And Vini was really good at that."

"Vini was a very good friend of mine at the time," says Stanley. "I enjoyed working with him, because it was working with a friend. I don't necessarily mean that it was best for the band."

Matters weren't aided by the rapidly deteriorating relationship between an increasingly addled Peter Criss and his bandmates.

"Well, Peter wasn't there for the most part," says Messina. "Anton Fig played drums on *Dynasty* and also *Unmasked*. Peter did come by occasionally."

Dynasty was an admirable, if not entirely successful attempt to move things forward. *I Was Made For Loving You* was a hundred thousand years away from their trademark stadium rock bombast; inspired by their trips to notorious Manhattan nightclub Studio 54 ("It was the place to go," says

1981

MUSIC FROM 'THE ELDER'

CASABLANCA

Kiss's grand folly, and the album that nearly finished them off. It's not as bad as all that – not least the wimptastic *A World Without Heroes* – but it would take them years to recover from it.

Jay Messina, "Paul loved to dance"); its shameless hopping on to the disco bandwagon was as shocking as it was brilliant. The funk intro of *Sure Know Something* was no less jarring, though at least that swiftly flipped into something more recognisably Kiss. Naturally, the band were savvy enough to throw their less open-minded fans a bone in the shape of Simmons' thumping *Charisma* and *X-Ray Eyes*. Today, Stanley views it with mixed feelings.

"Vini brought a different element to the band, because he came from a different era and a different style of music," says the erstwhile Starchild. "I loved that, but it doesn't necessarily mean it had a place in the band. The danger of a producer is that they might have an interpretation of what they believe you are, and it can certainly dilute what you are if it's not on target."

Despite the success of *I Was Made For Loving You*, Kiss were wobbling like drag queens on nine-inch heels when they started recording the follow-up to *Dynasty*. Released in 1980, *Unmasked* would do nothing to assuage their hardcore fans. It eased back on the disco juice, only to replace it with the sort of uncharacteristically glossy pop-rock that screamed 'surefire hit' at the dawn of the new decade. This was MTV rock *before* MTV had even been invented.

"*Unmasked* is the product of a dysfunctional band," says Stanley. "People were surrounding themselves with a lot of sycophants who were telling them what was best for them to hear, but was ultimately most destructive for the band. Was I guilty of that? (Laughs) Oh, of course I was guiltless."

"Ace Frehley and Peter Criss wanted to leave the band. Fucking idiots to this day, poor guys." - Gene Simmons

Sonically, *Unmasked* veered towards the featherweight. "There was more attention paid to the musicality than the raw rock'n'rollness of the band," as Jay Messina puts it. But listening to it today, it's a far better record than its reputation suggests. With a chorus the size of the Chrysler Building, *Tomorrow* is the first great Kiss anthems of the 80s, while Ace Frehley's *Two Sides Of The Coin* and *Torpedo* dump a bucketload of Bronx grit all over the polished floors. The flipside was Stanley's winsome *Shandi*, a bona fide AOR masterpiece that took its influence, oddly, from Bruce Springsteen's *Sherry*. With its mix of fluff and steel, the album was a bridge between Kiss's hard-rocking 70s past and their AOR-flecked 80s future. Not that the dwindling Kiss Army felt that way at the time: the album limped apologetically to No.35 in the Billboard charts.

"To point a finger at Vini would be crazy," says Stanley. "We were the ones writing the songs. The buck stops here, for better or for worse. All those albums were products of the guys at the centre of the storm, and that was us."

But if *Dynasty* and *Unmasked* were a sharp left and right turn respectively, their next album would be the sound of Kiss hitting the kerb and crashing straight into a concrete garbage can.

Released in 1981, *Music From 'The Elder'* was intended to be Kiss' grandest musical statement yet. Talismanic producer Bob Ezrin was back on board, alongside new drummer Eric Carr. The latter had replaced Criss in May 1980, just before they played their sole US show in support of *Unmasked* at New York's 5,000-capacity Palladium (a far cry from their previous New York gig, at Madison Square Garden). The first attempt to fix up Carr with a costume was less than successful. At management's insistence, Carr was going to be The Hawk. Except the effect wasn't quite what they wanted. "I looked like Chicken Man," the drummer later recalled. "I looked like a big chicken." In the end, Carr would come up with his own persona: The Fox.

But neither this latest addition to the Kiss menagerie nor Bob Ezrin could save *Music From 'The Elder'* from utter disaster. A largely incomprehensible concept album about a boy defending the earth from a race of super-aliens set to a soundtrack of portentous neo-classical rock that sounded like a Poundstretcher Pink Floyd, it remains Kiss's greatest folly. The whole experience was so bad that Ace Frehley appeared on just one track. He left soon afterwards, though the band wouldn't officially announce his departure for another 12 months.

"*'The Elder'* was the result of temporary insanity," says Gene Simmons. "We didn't know which way to go."

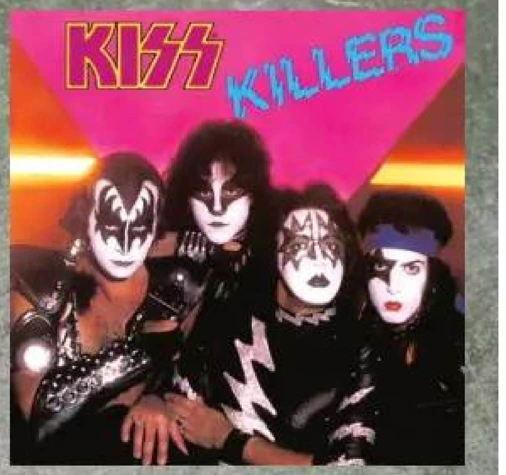
"We lost our focus," says Stanley. "I found myself looking for the respect of people who were never gonna respect what I was doing. Critical acclaim? Who needs it? We built our career on doing things our own way."

That may have been the case in the past, but »

Hard luck men: Gene and Paul share a rare light-hearted moment in the aftermath of *Music From 'The Elder'*, 1982.

TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY

1982



KILLERS

CASABLANCA

You wanted a stop-gap compilation featuring four fairly forgettable new tracks? You got it. Largely disposable, though at least it plugged the hole beneath the waterline.

RICHARD E. AARON/GETTY

Kiss my Ankh: new guitarist Vinnie Vincent shows off his Egyptian Ankh Warrior make-up design as the *Creatures Of The Night* tour arrives at Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium.

as 1981 bled into 1982, the world was changing. MTV had launched the previous August, but Kiss had been slow to latch on to its potential. While the rest of the planet gleefully embraced this brave new televisual world, Kiss were battling for their very survival.

Losing one original member was careless. Losing two was foolish. Recording a grand folly that turned out to be the worst-received album of their career was positively suicidal. And Kiss knew it.

"Two members left because of drugs and alcohol and we'd just recorded *'The Elder'* – that was not an ideal situation," says Gene Simmons with heavy understatement.

Still licking their self-inflicted wounds, Kiss had decided to top up the coffers and give themselves some wriggle room by releasing a Greatest Hits album, *Killers*. The plan was to compile an album of old Kiss classics, topped by four new tracks, produced by Michael James Jackson.

Enter Adam Mitchell. An easy-going Canadian who had scored a string of hits in his native country with 60s folk-rockers The Paupers, his CV featured such diverse artists as Cher, Art Garfunkel and Merle Haggard. In 1982, he had just come off the back of co-writing *Tears*, a hit single for John Waite, with a hotshot guitarist named Vincent Cusano, when he got the call from Jackson.

"He said, 'Listen, Kiss would like to do some co-writing, would you like to do it?'," recalls Mitchell, who admits he wasn't a Kiss fan before he started working with them. "*'The Elder'* had been a disaster," says Mitchell. "They were actually afraid that it was over. The brief was, 'Let's get back to what Kiss does best. Enough of this concept album nonsense. Let's write some really good Kiss rock'n'roll songs.'"

Mitchell quickly struck up a good working relationship with Simmons and especially Stanley. With the latter, he would pen two new songs, *Partners In Crime* and *I'm A Legend Tonight* for *Killers*. The other two were Stanley's *Nowhere To Run* and *Down On Your Knees*, a co-write between the singer and a young Canadian songwriter named Bryan Adams. Tellingly, there were no new Gene Simmons tracks on the album.

If *Killers* sounded like a contractual stop-gap designed to nudge the band back towards safer ground after the debacle of *'The Elder'*, it's because that's precisely what it was. And while none of the songs were truly memorable, they at least sounded focused. (And for Mitchell, it was the beginning of a close bond with Stanley. "Paul and I, when we were both single, we went out two or three times a week," says Mitchell. "At one point we even dated roommates.")

What it didn't solve was the problem of the Ace Frehley-shaped hole in Kiss' line-up. Bob Kulick, guitarist with cult AOR heroes Balance and a man who actually auditioned for Kiss back in 1973, stood in for Frehley on the new tracks from *Killers* (a role he had filled a few years earlier, when he overdubbed the Kiss man's guitar parts on *Alive II*). But Kulick was unhappy with his playing being steered towards fitting into the Kiss format.

The band subsequently auditioned around 80 guitarists to fill the vacant slot. Among was them future Bon Jovi man Richie Sambora. "They like the way I played," Sambora later recalled, "but they were going, 'You know this one? That one?' And I'm going, 'No!'" Another contender was Eddie Van Halen, who was increasingly unhappy in the band that bore his name; he would be talked out of leaving for Kiss by Simmons, who'd 'discovered' Van Halen, and Eddie's brother, Alex Van Halen.

None of which helped Kiss, and the situation wouldn't be resolved by the time they started work on their next album, *Creatures Of The Night*, even before *Killers* was finished.

"When we started doing *Creatures Of The Night*, Paul and I wrote the title track and a couple of others," says Mitchell. "I ended up playing one of the guitars on the song *Creatures Of The Night* – that riff in the middle, that's me playing it."

The album would eventually feature a multitude of ghost guitarists, including Mr Mister's Steve Farriss and jazz-rock man Robben Ford. Another was Adam Mitchell's sometime songwriting cohort Vincent Cusano.

"I am the one who introduced Vinnie to Kiss," says Mitchell, with a sigh. "They tried him out and his musical talent meant he was perfect for them."

At Mitchell's behest, Cusano was brought into the fold as both a songwriter and one of the numerous guitarists roped in to play on the album. Even though he doesn't feature on every track, his impact on the record was immediate: *Creatures Of The Night* turned the dials up to 'heavy metal' and banished the lingering aftertaste of *Music From 'The Elder'*. Kiss sounded hungry again, and that was partly down to Vincent, who co-wrote two of the album's highlights, *I Love It Loud* (with Simmons) and show-stopping power ballad *I Still Love You* (with Stanley).

"Vinnie is a phenomenal talent," says Adam Mitchell. "He plays like Ace, only way, way better. But – and it's a big but – there were personal issues right from the get-go. And they got in the way in the end."

"Vinnie was an excellent co-writer, and somebody with real ability on the guitar, which nine out of 10 times he sabotaged or just obliterated," says Stanley. "But in the studio, that could be harnessed and moulded into what it should be as opposed to where he invariably wanted it to go."

"Unmasked is the product of a dysfunctional band, surrounding themselves with a lot of destructive sycophants."

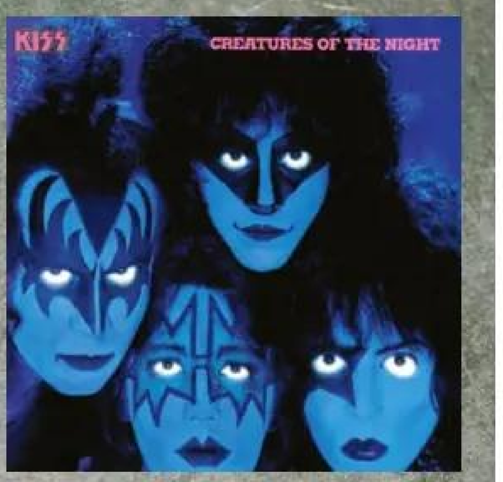
\- Paul Stanley

For now, though, Cusano was the favourite candidate as full-time replacement for Ace Frehley. By the end of 1982, he had officially joined Kiss – though as a salaried, "non-voting" member. He was given his own make-up and persona: The Wizard. He was also asked to adopt a stage name. The guitarist's own choice, Mick Fury, was blocked; instead, he was dubbed Vinnie Vincent.

"What was hard for me was taking the place of someone that fans really loved. It did not want to take anyone's place," said Vincent in Ken Sharp's official Kiss biography, *Behind The Mask*. "I was just there because I was asked to be there."

Despite his reservations, an Ankh-faced Vinnie Vincent made his stage debut with Kiss in Bismark, North Dakota, in December 1982. The album had been released two months earlier, and hailed as a return to form. The only snag is that people weren't buying it – it creaked into the US charts at 45. Neither were they buying concert tickets. The subsequent US tour found the band playing to half empty venues; an ignominous fall from grace for

1982



CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

CASABLANCA

This was more like it: a snarling Kiss at the their most defiantly heavy metal. They still managed to make room for Paul's patented power ballad *I Still Love You*, though.

a band who were one of the biggest draws of the 1970s.

"In June 1983, Kiss played the largest show we ever played, at the Maracana Stadium in Rio," says Simmons. "There was anywhere from 190,000 to 210,000 people there. It looked like a nation – Kiss nation. We came back to America and it was dead. We'd done our heaviest album ever, cos we felt that we had something to prove. But the masses weren't ready for it. *Creatures Of The Night* halted – it just didn't work. It had to do with upheaval within the band and the upheaval of the times. We took a look at each other and went, 'What are we gonna do?'"

The answer was simple: take off the make-up!

Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons both stand by *Creatures Of The Night*, and rightly so.

"*Creatures* was really a reaffirmation of us trying to get back on track from having been completely clueless for a while," says Stanley. "*Lick It Up* was the next step."

If Vinnie Vincent was unhappy with his situation in Kiss he wasn't letting on, as Kiss entered New York's Record Plant and Right Track studios with producer Michael James Jackson to record their fourth album of the decade. *Lick It Up* took the metalized blueprint of its predecessor and added some 80s flash: *Exciter* (featuring a guitar solo courtesy of Rick Derringer) showed the trials of the last few years hadn't blunted their edge, while the title track was a bona fide AOR anthem.

"*Lick It Up* was a really good album, though on a lot of levels I thought *Creatures* was better," says Stanley. "But I thought that a good reason for taking off the make-up was because people were listening to the albums with their eyes, and they didn't want to see the make up. The make-up detracted from the music."

And so, midway through 1983, Kiss made the momentous decision to wipe off the greasepaint. Stanley had wanted to lose the make-up for *Creatures Of The Night*, but Gene Simmons was having none of it. "We worked in a way where if someone doesn't want to do something, we go with that person," says Stanley. "In this case, it was a monumental move for him, so we didn't do it.

"I went, 'What!? That's sacrilegious! You're out of your mind. It won't work'," says the bassist now. "It was actually Paul who felt more comfortable. Intrinsically, Paul onstage is closer to who he is offstage than I am. For me, it's psychic trip – onstage, it's cathartic, I let out the inner demons."

The subject was raised again as the band recorded *Lick It Up*. Simmons was still unconvinced, and remained so until the very last minute.

1983

LICK IT UP

CASABLANCA

Aka: The One Where They Took The Make-Up Off. Newbie Vinnie Vincent clearly gave them a shot in the arm, and you won't find a better Paul Stanley wail than the one that ushers in the album's glorious title track.

ROSS HALFIN

Dressed to kill: Kiss might've ditched the panstick, but that didn't mean Paul Stanley couldn't add a touch of glamour to the *Lick It Up* tour. "I looked like a football player in a tutu," he later reflected.

Chicago Rock City: as the *Lick It Up* tour reaches UCI Pavilion on February 15, 1984, Gene and Paul flank Vinnie Vincent, ever ready to forcibly curtail another of his excessive solos.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY

"So we had recorded *Lick It Up* with a new line-up, and the material was what the material was," says the bassist. "We stood around with a photographer and just took photos. I said, 'Well, we look like every other band.' One of the shots had me sticking my tongue out – we had to have some kind of connection with Kiss as we were before, or otherwise we're just Britny Fox or Cinderella. So I closed my eyes and went, 'OK, let's try it'."

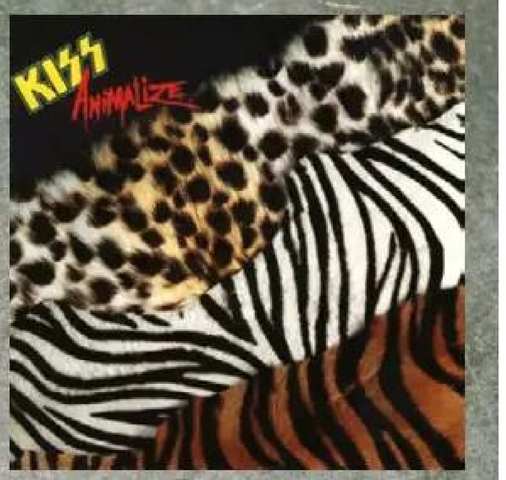
The band had come to appreciate the value of MTV, and it was via the increasingly powerful music channel that they opted to make their big reveal. And so, at 11pm on Sunday, September 1983, the four members of Kiss finally made their first official public appearance without make-up, even if the day and time-slot of the broadcast only illustrate the reduced circumstances they found themselves in after a couple of flop albums.

"For me, the day was anti-climactic," says Stanley. "It wasn't the original band. The mystique revolved around the original four guys. Once that was gone, it was just a nice press angle. For me, it didn't have the same impact."

But the partnership between Kiss and MTV certainly had its upside. The newly unmasked band had made a video for *Lick It Up* – the first Kiss video to be picked up by the channel. Over subsequent years, the power of the channel to make or break bands may well have made an impact – conscious or subconscious – on the more melodic direction taken by the band.

If Kiss's big day had failed to move Stanley, it was a different matter when the band found themselves onstage *sans* the Max Factor for the first time. "The first show without make-up was quite jolting," says Stanley. "I remember looking across the stage and thinking, 'What the hell are we doing in front of an audience in these clothes?'."

1984



ANIMALIZE

VERTIGO, 1984

Exit Vincent, enter Mark St John for the album that pushed Kiss to the front of the pack. Stand-outs *Heaven's On Fire* and *Thrills In The Night* showed they could do this melodic rock thing just as well as the bands they influenced in the first place.

There were more serious problems for Kiss than stepping out onstage without their battle dress and make-up. Always a difficult character, Vinnie Vincent was becoming visibly unhappy in the band. And he was starting to act up. At a show at the LA Forum, he deliberately extended his guitar solo, keeping an increasingly apoplectic Stanley waiting for his cue at the side of the stage. In the dressing room afterwards, the pair reportedly came close to a fist-fight. The end was now in sight for The Wizard.

"I just wasn't living up to my full potential," said Vincent in 1985, shortly after his inevitable departure from the band. "I wasn't able to be who I am. I wanted to do things that would have made the group more exciting and more meaningful. *Lick It Up* probably shows about 25 per cent of what I'm capable of achieving."

Today, Vincent has seemingly stepped away from music. Since leaving Kiss ("He was most definitely fired," Stanley has confirmed), he released two albums with his band, the Vinnie Vincent Invasion; bizarrely, given the acrimony that surrounded his departure, he also contributed to Kiss's 1992 album *Revenge*. According to Simmons he has sued the band 14 times, each one unsuccessful. In May 24 2011, he was arrested on suspicion of assaulting his wife. Attempts to contact him for this article proved fruitless.

"It's well documented," says Stanley, firmly. "It's nothing I need to go into. But he's his own worst enemy, in addition to having a multitude of other enemies out there now. He's somebody who is not the kind of person I want to be around."

Ironically, all the pain was worth it. The melodic rock edge of *Lick It Up* helped it become the first Kiss album to sell 500,000 copies in the United States since *Unmasked*.

"Where *Creatures Of The Night* died, *Lick It Up* came out and actually worked," says Simmons. "It became a big record, and the concert halls filled up. Without the make-up."

Kiss were back on track. Or at least *some* of them were.

If the first half of the 80s had been Kiss against the world, then the second half would be Kiss versus themselves. When they began work on 1984's *Animalize*, the times were changing. Though Kiss' vision had started to dovetail with that of the MTV programmers, Def Leppard's 'Mutt' Lange-produced *Pyromania* had raised the bar on what

RUNAWAY

Gene Simmons played bad guy opposite *Magnum, PI* in this big-budget turkey...

1984 sci-fi thriller *Runaway* boasted a ham-tastic turn from Simmons as villainous Dr Charles Luther. Despite starring Tom Selleck, the movie made less than $7m and was trounced at the box office by low-budget Arnie vehicle *Terminator*.

Gene gets mean.

ROSS HALFIN

a rock record could and should sound like. Elsewhere, a new breed of bands were nipping at Kiss's Cuban heels, among them a poodle-permed New Jersey outfit named Bon Jovi.

"We started working on *Animalize*, but there was upheaval," says Simmons. "Vinnie Vincent was a problem. He had to go. And music itself was changing. English pop came in with synthetic drums. It was the decade of Duran Duran and the Thompson Twins and all that stuff. And rock itself was changing – the hair bands became popular. The idea was that you had to look better than your girlfriend."

At least Kiss had a new guitarist to keep themselves moving forward. Mark St John – born Mark Norton – was a California-born six-string hero-in-waiting who the band picked after a string of auditions. In keeping with the times, he had a flashy contemporary style that was more Yngwie Malmsteen than Ace Frehley.

"I come from an older school of guitar players," says Stanley, "and the 80s were immersed in guys doing slide whistles and calliopes on their guitars, playing it with the whammy bars, turning it into something that isn't even a guitar as far as I'm concerned. But it was a component of bands at that point, and it needed to be incorporated. But that was another point where the band was going through more changes. We had a new guitarist. And there was a bass player who was AWOL."

More than 25 years on, Gene Simmons freely admits that by the mid-80s he had taken his eye off the Kiss-branded ball. "I started getting movie offers," he says, he says with a shrug. "And I'm not the sort of person who is happy doing just one thing."

Simmons' screen career was stuttering but eventful. In 1984, he starred as an evil scientist alongside Tom Selleck in the sci-fi film *Runaway*; the same year he appeared in an episode of *Miami Vice* as a nattily-dressed pimp. Over the next few years, he popped up as a radio DJ in schlocky horror flick *Trick Or Treat* and in a truly has-to-be-seen-to-be-believed role as transvestite super-villain Velvet Von Ragner in straight-to-video 'thriller' *Never Too Young To Die*.

> **"We'd done our heaviest album ever, cos we felt that we had something to prove. But the masses weren't ready for it."**
> - Gene Simmons

"Yeah, I lost it in terms of spending time being committed to the band full time," he says now. "I succumbed to Hollywood, to pop culture, to the hair bands, to the times. Guilty as charged."

It was left to Stanley to steer the Kiss ship, and he stepped manfully up to the wheel. With his bandmate absent, the singer took on the task of producing the album. Any disgruntlement he felt with Simmons was overshadowed by the problems he was having with Mark St John.

"Mark was kind of strange, because I'd send him home to construct a solo, then he'd come in the next day and play it," says Stanley. "And I'd say, 'Play it again', and he'd play a completely different solo. I ended up either singing the solos to him or sometimes even punching in and playing some of them. I would say to Mark, 'Go home and listen to Paul Kossoff'. He would say, 'I can play faster than he can'. I said, 'That's the problem.' He would look at me like I was speaking Mandarin."

St John had a different take on the situation. "I don't know why they even booked studio time when none of them were there," said the guitarist in the late 80s. "Gene was doing a movie in Canada, Paul was in Bermuda with [disco singer] Lisa Hartman that week, and Eric was in Florida, fucking some girls. So I'm in the studio recording – just me and a couple of engineers."

It's a mark of Stanley's stubborn determination and general dedication to the Kiss cause that not only was *Animalize* finished without the singer murdering at least two of his colleagues, but that it sounded so good. The fact that it's one of the most overlooked albums in the Kiss canon can't detract from the fact that it »

1985

ASYLUM

VERTIGO

Exit St John, enter Bruce Kulick for more of the same. *Asylum* trod much the same ground as its predecessor, though *Tears Are Falling* remains a shining AOR gem in their 80s crown.

stands as 35 minutes and 42 seconds of matchless 1980s AOR-tinged arena rock. At its best – *Heaven's On Fire* and the Jean Beauvoir co-write *Thrills In The Night* – it more than matched the cream of their 70s output, and placed Kiss at the head of the melodic rock pack.

For his part, Gene Simmons was happy to cede control of the studio to his bandmate. "Well, who else could do it?" says the bassist now. "I hate the studio. To me it's like pulling teeth. Some bands love it. But there's something that happens onstage that you can't get anywhere else. Me? I need to be worshipped as the god that I am."

Paul Stanley is less jocular. "Making that album was basically me getting people to implement what I needed… To play the parts I couldn't."

One victim of Stanley's bloodless coup was the unfortunate Mark St John. "There are two songs on *Animalize* I didn't play on: *Lonely Is The Night* and *Murder In High Heels*," St John told Kiss biographer Ken Sharp. "I had reactive arthritis. My knuckles on my left hand were swollen up, and so were my left kneecap and my Achilles tendon. So I virtually had to walk with a cane."

St John would later put his ailment down to the stress of the situation, but it presented a more immediate problem. The band were due to kick off the *Animalize* tour in the UK, and St John was in no fit state to play live.

Step forward, Bruce Kulick.

Of all the people who have passed through the ranks of Kiss, the recruitment of Bruce Kulick was the most unusual. The younger brother of one-time Kiss session guitarist Bob Kulick, Bruce first met Paul Stanley via his brother in the late 70s. "My brother would say, 'I have a car, let's go hang out with Paul'," says the guitarist. "We'd go to a pub named Privates in New York that was pretty hip, catch a movie, stuff like that."

Kulick had also taken part in the mass audition before they recruited Vinnie Vincent. "Then Vinnie pulls whatever it was that put him out of the picture, and they're looking for a hotshot guitar player," he says. "All of a sudden, Mark St John is top of the list. I remember seeing the photo in *Kerrang!* magazine, page 24. I was like, 'This guy is wrong. This guy should not be in Kiss!'

"I had nothing against Mark, and it wasn't like I should have been in Kiss instead. It looked wrong. It was just *wrong*."

When St John began having health problems during the recording of *Animalize*, Kulick's name came up as an extra pair of hands. "My brother used to do that, so when I got a phone call I was shocked: 'Wow, they went to the younger brother, this is cool'," says Kulick.

"Vinnie Vincent was his own worst enemy, in addition to having a multitude of other enemies out there."
- Paul Stanley

The guitarist would play on the two *Animalize* tracks that St John was unable to complete. "I was thrilled. It was easy to work with Paul, I liked the vibe, and then he said a couple of prophetic words to me: 'Don't cut your hair.' I was, like, 'Why is he saying that? He's gotta be thinking that something is going on'."

In late August, St John's

NEIL ZLOZOWER STUDIO

Murder in high heels: the *Animalize*-era line-up, featuring blink-and-you'll-miss-him new guitarist Mark St John, far right.

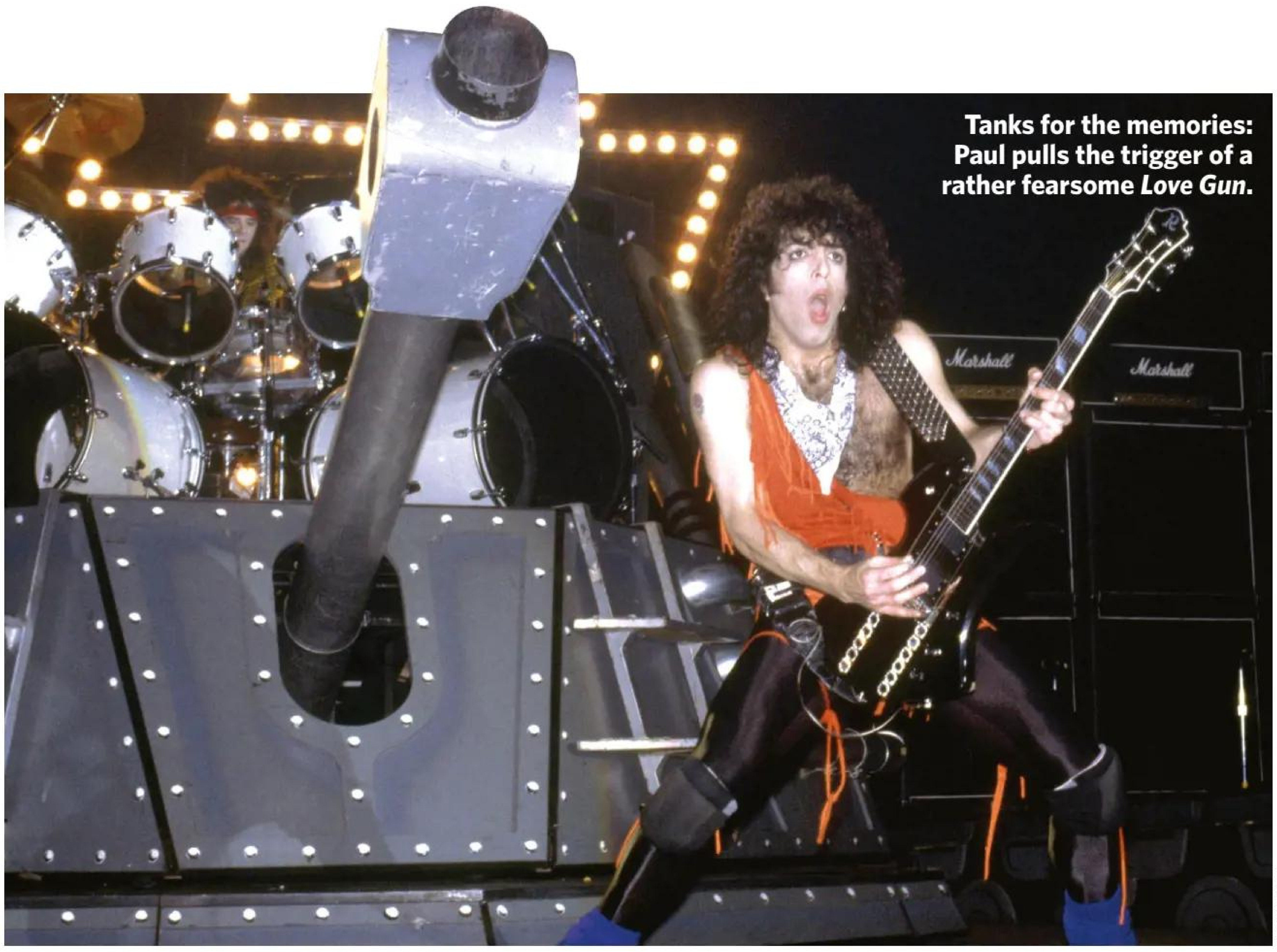
suspicions were confirmed. Kulick received a call asking if he could fly to England to stand in for Mark St John.

"I could tell that it didn't look like they were gonna drag Mark over there," says Kulick. "But it didn't look like they were letting him go immediately. I don't know if it was a contractual thing, they kind of wanted to play it out because they made a big stink about him being the new guitarist."

Kulick's first gig as a temporary member of Kiss was in Brighton on September 30, 1984. He recalls that he was so nervous that his knees were literally knocking.

"I got the nickname Spruce Goose right there," says Kulick, "because I was afraid to move. All of a sudden it's like those guys had ants in their pants. We didn't do a rehearsal like that. I kinda froze up. I got some intricate guitar parts here – some of *Animalize* isn't exactly two-chord rock."

When they returned to America two weeks later, Kulick was kept on for the subsequent US tour. This time, St John accompanied the band on the road. The plan was to ease him into the show with short 'guest' spots, building up to an entire show at the tour's conclusion.



Tanks for the memories: Paul pulls the trigger of a rather fearsome *Love Gun*.

ROSS HALFIN

"It was a strange situation, but I wasn't gonna do a Nancy Kerrigan – I wasn't gonna club him in the middle of the night in the hallway," says Kulick. "We even used to jam a little bit backstage. I kept it very positive – I knew I had the home team advantage by touring with them. But the truth was that they knew that I had it down and I knew how to do this."

Kulick's self-assurance paid off. Arthritic or not, by the end of the tour Mark St John ha sunk himself. "He didn't do badly when he had those chances to do parts of the show, and then a full show," says Kulick. "But he was kind of trying to upstage them, which is a really bad thing. And then that was it."

Mark St John's final gig as a member of Kiss was on November 29, 1984, at the Veteran's Memorial Arena in Binghampton, New York; his tenure had lasted all of eight months (sadly, the guitarist died of a cerebral haemorrhage in 2007).

"It was sometime in December in 1984 that I got that phone call: Hey, we want you to be the guy," says Kulick. "I remember Paul calling me and I was thrilled. 'Wow, I got the gig!' I never got the big splash of 'New guitarist of Kiss!', but then there's a lot of pressure that comes with that."

Within a few months, Kulick was holed up with the rest of Kiss in New York's pre-eminent studio, Electric Ladyland, for his first official Kiss record, *Asylum*. It was a baptism of fire, not least seeing the push-pull dynamic of the Stanley-Simmons working relationship at close quarters.

"Back then, they were competing all the time," says Kulick. "That doesn't sound healthy, but it was. They worked independently, then together. Gene is just a workaholic. Was he able to be in Kiss and pursue and acting career? Yes. Paul didn't quite see if that way, but then again it gave Paul purpose to say, 'I'm gonna produce the record, I'm gonna take over here'."

1987

CRAZY NIGHTS

VERTIGO

Producer Ron Nevison toned up any remaining flab and gave Kiss a proper pop polish. The gang-vocal glory of *Crazy Crazy Nights* and synth-heavy *Turn Up The Night* are twin masterclasses in stadium-sized AOR.

With Bruce Kulick on board, Eric Carr was no longer 'the new guy'. Five years in, and the lustre of being the drummer in Kiss was starting to fade.

"When I first joined the band, the excitement and the fun of it wasn't… in the forefront of Eric's mind," says Kulick. "It was more like he was getting disillusioned. I used to get a lot of gripes from him, and I was, like, 'Would you shut up! Do you realise how lucky you are?'."

Like Vinnie Vincent, Carr was getting restless. But the drummer's frustrations manifested themselves in less confrontational ways.

"Eric was a sweet, funny guy, but he acted out sometimes," says Kulick. "There was a funny thing that happened in England on the *Animalize* tour. Some journalist from the *NME* or one of those magazines befriended him. The next thing you know, there's photos of him in the bathtub, drinking champagne, splashed in the paper. That didn't go down very well. At the airport the next day, Gene and Paul were like, 'What were you thinking?' He was a little unhappy, so that was him going, 'I'm gonna get in trouble with the parents.' I'd never put myself in that position. If I wanted to have fun with a girl, there was never gonna be a camera there."

With the release of *Asylum* highlight *Tears Are Falling* as a single, Kiss confirmed their status as the darlings of 80s MTV rock. That single was a prime-time slice of 80s soft rock, leagues away from the outright 70s aggression of the likes of *100,000 years*.

For all the resurgent success that *Animalize* and *Asylum* brought, by 1987 Kiss found themselves playing catch up with the bands they'd inspired. Bon Jovi, who had supported Kiss in the UK on the *Animalize* tour, had shifted several million

copies of their third album, *Slippery When Wet*. Poison and Cinderella weren't far behind. The fact that these bands ramped up the glamour quotient of their rock'n'roll wasn't lost on the men who helped invent the look in the first place.

"Because of the success of those bands, and a lot of others who were very comfortable doing what they were doing, we succumbed to it," says Gene Simmons. "I remember being at an airport shopping mall in Minneapolis. I walked past this woman's dress store and I saw this *thing* and I stopped. I don't what it was – it was red and it was shiny and had all this little pieces that moved. I went: 'I gotta buy that'.

"And I put this thing on, and of course it ripped on the sides. So I had the seamstress add some fabric. I just thought I looked like peaches and cream. It was the most embarrassing cross-dressing thing you could ever imagine. I looked like a football player in a tutu."

While they couldn't match their younger rivals sartorially, the musical playing field was at least more level. Two consecutive platinum albums had given the band a renewed confidence by the time they entered the studio to record their 14th studio album, or at least for Paul Stanley it had. Gene Simmons, on the other hand, was altogether less engaged with the matter at hand.

"Gene can say whatever he wants about being disenchanted with the 80s," says Stanley. "But he was the problem. Or part of the problem. When he was out doing other projects, or trying to become a TV star, or working with other bands – and he would have been better off sleeping than working with some of the calibre of bands he worked with – it compromised everything he did."

After two albums that had ostensibly been helmed by Stanley (though the production credits read Stanley-Simmons), the singer decided it was time to bring in an outside producer. In this case, it was Ron Nevison, the man who had overseen Ozzy Osbourne's slick *The Ultimate Sin* (which reached No.6 in the Billboard charts in 1986, his highest solo chart placing until 1995's *Ozzmosis*) and Heart's career-saving multi-platinum 1986 eponymous album, along with its equally successful 1987 follow-up, *Bad Animals*. Nevison was the go-to guy for 80s rock with a hi-vis pop sheen.

"Paul was really excited by Nevison," says Bruce Kulick. "He befriended him, they were hanging out. Paul had nine songs ready to go for the album. Gene was not in bed with Nevison at all, vibes wise, because I think he thought he might be too pop."

Any objections the bassist might have had were undermined by the fact that he'd effectively let Stanley sit in the driving seat. "He was either in the studio tired or bringing in material that was sub-par at that point," says Stanley. "It was very gradual, but certainly during *Crazy Nights*, it was becoming clear that I was not happy pulling all the weight. I said, 'This doesn't work for me – I either have a partner or I don't. I'm not looking for accolades. I'm looking for input'."

Crazy Nights was treated sniffily upon its release in September 1987, but today its shamelessly commercial approach has aged incredibly well. The gang vocals of MTV staple *Crazy Crazy Nights* (which reached No.4 in the UK singles charts, marking their first British Top 10 hit) and skyscraping AOR synths of *Turn On The Night* approach pop-rock perfection, while *Reason To Live* is the greatest ballad Foreigner never wrote (though given the fact it sounded suspiciously similar to *I Want To Know What Love Is*, Mick Jones could have justifiably claimed to have written the song anyway).

Today, Stanley looks back on the album with mixed feelings: proud of some of the music, but undeniably narked at the circumstances in which it was made.

"It may be admirable to stay in a leaky ship and keep bailing water, but it doesn't get the same result," says Stanley. "I didn't do that by choice. And what was lacking was my team-mate's commitment. The work he was bringing in was sub-par, but the bottom line is that he was absent.

"Did it feel like I was flying the Kiss flag alone at that point?" Stanley asks. "Oh totally. That's no secret. It was in my hands."

Things weren't much better with the follow-up, 1989's *Hot In The Shade*. While Gene had taken Paul's criticisms on board, the recording of the album was still less than smooth – not helped by the fact that they'd decided to co-produce it.

"I think they wanted to return to straightahead rock'n'roll," says Bruce Kulick. "So the record started off as demos, which we then started overdubbing. I understood why, but I didn't like that whole approach.

"We were back with Gene and Paul producing, which means the two of them are gonna

1988

SMASHES, THRASHES & HITS

VERTIGO

Another year, another cash-in compilation - this one in a bolstered by two new Stanley songs, *(You Make Me) Rock Hard* and the fabulously camp *Let's Put The X In Sex*. Truly atrocious cut-and-paste sleeve, though...

Full pelt: new guitarist Bruce Kulick and Paul Stanley don jungle-cat prints as the *Animalize* tour reaches Milwaukee's Mecca Arena, December 30, 1984.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY

If life is a radio, turn it up to 10: a re-energized Kiss pose backstage as the *Crazy Nights* tour arrives at Wembley Arena, September 25, 1988.

GEORGE CHINTICONIC

compromise – 'I like that song of yours, but I don't like that one'; 'Well, if you let me use mine…' That was one of the weaknesses of the two of them producing."

"*Hot In The Shade* was very fragmented, very piecemeal," acknowledges Stanley. "We were like a ship without a captain." So much so that the singer decided to embark on a solo tour at the end of 1989.

After the pop-rock glories of *Crazy Nights*, *Hot In The Shade* – note the tongue in cheek acronym its initials form – sounded like a step backwards. The likes of *Prisoner Of Love* and Desmond Child/Holly Knight co-write *Hide Your Heart* were proficient, by-numbers arena rock.

Handily, the glorious power-ballad *Forever* provided them with their biggest US hit in years, though the song would feature Bruce Kulick playing bass rather than Gene. But for all the ongoing strains within the group, there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

"When we went on tour, we rallied," says Stanley. "We began to embrace our history. We would literally hit every period of the band, and we did it proudly."

Kiss left the 80s in much better shape than they entered it. They had a stable line-up and a sales graph that was headed upwards rather than downwards. There was just one dark cloud on the horizon: in 1990, Eric Carr would be diagnosed with a cancerous tumour in his heart. Sadly, the drummer died of complications from the disease on November 24, 1991.

Kiss' next album, 1992's Bob Ezrin-produced *Revenge* (their sixteenth) would be dedicated to the fallen drummer.

"In hindsight, we knew we needed a catalyst, somebody to focus us," says Stanley of that record. "And Bob Ezrin seemed like the right choice. Working with Bob was a pleasure, and he had the discipline that we enjoyed. And we were pleased with it. I didn't love everything on it, but that's what you give up when you have a producer."

Ezrin certainly helped pull Kiss together for an unexpectedly cohesive album. He also helped channel the natural competitiveness between Simmons and Stanley.

"Are they in competition?" says Kulick. "In many, many ways, throughout their entire career. But as much as it causes some problems, it's actually created one of the biggest bands in the world. It's healthy competition."

It was arguably this competition that kept Kiss together while other, less stubborn bands would long have packed away the leather trousers and silk shirts. Looking back on Kiss's most tumultuous decade, Gene Simmons admits culpability for at least some of their difficulties.

"The songs I wrote in the 80s were nowhere near what they should have been," says Simmons. "I got caught up with it. I was seduced by the times."

"Yeah, I lost it… I succumbed to Hollywood, to pop culture, to the hair bands, to the times. Guilty as charged."
- Gene Simmons

Stanley draws an analogy with an Olympic athlete. "You go in there to best yourself. And sometimes you don't have the capacity. Every time we went in the studio, we went in with the idea of making a great album.

"But every time we went in the studio, we were trying to make a great album under whatever the circumstances were. And whoever was in the band and whatever the politics were.

"Let's be honest, at different times, everybody has been MIA in this band. But without patting myself on the back, I certainly showed up every day and gave it my best."

The singer says that he hasn't listened to Kiss's 80s albums in their entirety for a long time. But he sees the value of the records – and everything they went through to make them.

"They were all part of getting us back to where we are now," says Paul Stanley. "We faltered, and we certainly got lost. But out of those lost periods came some really good stuff. There are some real gems in there."

1989

HOT IN THE SHADE

VERTIGO

Kiss's last album of the 80s was slightly less focussed than what came before it, though titanic collaborations with Desmond Child and Holly Knight (the graceful power ballad *Hide Your Heart*) and Michael Bolton (*Forever*) ensure that they're not stuck in a holding pattern. A solid end to a most tumultuous decade.

GET IN THE RING

For **Kiss**, the 1990s was a rollercoaster decade that took them from the lows of a shelved 'grunge' album to a money-spinning reunion to a near-catastropic fall-out. Roll up and step into the *Psycho Circus*...

Words: **Dave Everley**

It was Tupac Shakur who broke the news every Kiss fan wanted to hear. The gangsta rap superstar was one of the high-profile presenters at the 38th Grammy Awards, held in Los Angeles on February 28, 1996. Taking the stage in a Versace suit and Death Row Records medallion, Shakur quietened the audience to make an announcement.

"You all down with this?" he said. "We're gonna try to liven it up. You know how the Grammys used to be all straight-lookin' folks with suits, everybody lookin' tired, no surprises. We tired of that. We need something different; something new. So let's shock the people."

From the side of the stage strode a quartet of towering figures in stack-heels and make-up. This was Kiss – specificially it was the four men who had started the band more than four decades ago: Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley and Peter Criss, on the same stage in full costume for the first time in 17 years.

They were at the Grammys to present the award for Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group With Vocal. They didn't say much, but then they didn't need to. This was Kiss letting everybody know that the Hottest Band In The World were officially back. But in typical Kiss fashion, it was never going to be smooth sailing.

Kiss had exited the 1980s shakily. Their two most recent albums, 1987's *Crazy Nights* and 1989's *Hot In The Shade*, were pallid pop-metal affairs held together by sheer willpower on the part of Paul Stanley.

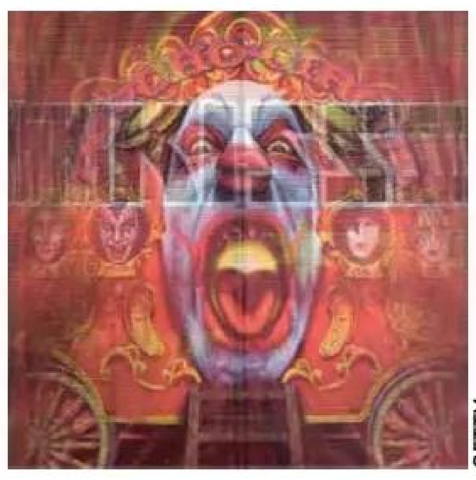
But worse was to come. In 1990, longtime drummer Eric Carr was diagnosed with cancer of the heart. Sadly he lost his battle with the illness and died on November 24, 1991 – the same day as Freddie Mercury.

It was a blow, but there was no way it would stop Kiss. Stanley and Simmons considered replacing Carr with Aynsley Dunbar, the veteran drummer who had played with everyone from David Bowie to Journey, but decided he was too high-profile. Instead, they recruited Alice Cooper sticksman Eric Singer, who had toured in Stanley's late 80s solo band and stood in for Carr on Kiss's cover of Argent's *God Gave Rock And Roll To You*, recorded for the soundtrack of the 1991 comedy movie *Bill And Ted's Bogus Journey*.

"Some fans thought that we were insensitive," said Gene Simmons. "'How could the band continue, why didn't you love him?' But they weren't there. They're not qualified to say."

Singer's first album with Kiss was *Revenge*, a record that, like *Creatures Of The Night* a decade earlier, was designed to reposition them as a back-to-basics rock band. Produced by their old associate Bob Ezrin – the man who had helped steer 1975's *Destroyer* to greatness – it was their most focussed album in years, and their heaviest.

This new approach was best summed up by lead single *Unholy*, a menacing slab of modern metal with a scowling vocal from Gene. Unexpectedly, that was one of three tracks co-written with former Kiss guitarist Vinnie Vincent, who had left acrimoniously in 1983 and spent the ensuing years in a war of words with his former employers. But *Unholy* was no fluke, as Stanley's salacious *Take It Off* and Simmons' lecherous *Domino* proved. The concluding drum solo, *Carr Jam 1981*, was a tribute to their fallen bandmate, while the album itself was dedicated to Carr.



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"It's time to punish people," said Simmons of *Revenge*'s directness. "I want people to know when they get it, they will be punished."

This fighting talk seemed to work. *Revenge* gave Kiss their first Top 10 album in the US since *Dynasty* back in 1979. But despite its musical qualities, it didn't have legs. It may have eventually reached gold status, shipping 500,000 copies, but that was a fraction of what the likes of Nirvana and Pearl Jam were selling. In Kiss' heads, there was only one solution: if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

While 1993's serviceable live album, *Alive III*, kept the fanbase happy, behind the scenes Kiss intended to tear up the blueprint. In 1994, Stanley and Simmons met with Alice In Chains producer Toby Wright.

"They wanted to follow a little hip trend going on at the time called grunge music," Wright later recalled. "The bottom line was, like all artists, they wanted to sell records."

Kiss weren't the only veteran band to abruptly change direction – Mötley Crüe and Def Leppard were having the same thoughts. But Stanley and Simmons embraced it more than most. Dispensing with the party metal anthems and big ballads in favour of a dark, grinding sound that was closer to Soundgarden and Alice In Chains than anything Kiss themselves had written before, new songs such *Hate* and *Master & Slave* were as blunt and dirgey as their titles suggested.

> **"I got into a big argument with Gene about the direction of the album. He said he wanted to sound like 'the bald guy.' He meant Billy Corgan."**
>
> Producer Toby Wright

Kiss and make up: the classic line-up in 1996.

'Ugly and no fun': Gene and Paul on the Kiss Farewell Tour.

The *Revenge*-era line up with Eric Singer, second left.

"I remember getting into a big argument with Gene about the direction of the album," said Wright. "He said he wanted to be like that 'bald guy, the one that's on the top of the charts.' He meant Billy Corgan."

The world would have to wait a while to hear Kiss's new direction. "We were about done with the record when Gene got the call," said Wright. "Somebody offered him 100 million to put back on the makeup with all the original members. We all knew right as the words came out of his mouth that we were done."

Carnival Of Souls was shelved. Kiss – or at least Gene and Paul – had other business to attend.

Only Kiss would dream of commandeering an aircraft carrier for a press conference. It was April 16, 1996, and the band had invited journalists aboard the USS Intrepid, docked just off Manhattan. But this was aircraft carrier-sized news – they were there to announced Alive/Worldwide, the first shows the four original members had played, in costume, since 1979.

Anyone paying attention would have realised a reunion was always on the cards. In August 1995, Ace Frehley and Peter Criss had joined the current Kiss line-up to play a few songs during their MTV Unplugged appearance (released the following years as a live album). Tupac's announcement at the 1996 Grammys confirmed it.

The first show of the tour was set for the 50,000-capacity Tiger Stadium in Detroit, the band's home-from-home.

"To be honest, we weren't even sure we would sell out the show," Gene said in his biography *Kiss And Make-Up*. "Tickets went on sale one Friday night. At six in the morning on Saturday, Doc *[McGhee, manager]* called me at home to tell me that he had some good news and some bad news. I asked for the bad news first. 'Well,' he said, 'we don't have any more tickets to sell.' We had sold out the whole stadium in under an hour."

Within four days, 40,000 tickets had been sold for the tour. Any worries that this would be anything other than a success fell away, as did the old issues between the warring members.

"Before the first show I was sitting next to Gene and I started beating out a fill on my leg, and then I started playing his leg, just like I used to do for our big shows twenty years earlier," wrote Peter Criss in his own biography, *From Makeup To Breakup*. "I finally broke him. He started laughing. 'You Italians, nothing changes, huh?'"

The show itself was a triumph. The set focussed exclusively on the band's imperial 70s era, hitting all the buttons Kiss fans wanted to hear: *Deuce*, *Strutter*, *Firehouse*, *Rock And Roll All Nite*, even Frehley's solo hit *New York Groove*.

"The force of the crowd reaction nearly lifted me off my feet," recalled Frehley "When the show was over, we congratulated each other backstage. There was a genuine feeling of camaraderie."

The Alive/Worldwide tour ran for nearly 18 months, raking in over $140 million. If it wasn't quite the unalloyed triumph Gene Simmons would have liked – a handful of shows towards the end of the tour were cancelled due to low ticket sales – it still succeeded in putting Kiss back on the pedestal where they belonged.

The next logical step would be for the original foursome to record a new album together. Confusingly, there had already been a Kiss record released mid-way through the Alive/Worldwide tour, though this was the shelved *Carnival Of Souls* rather than a proper follow-up to *Revenge* (or, more accurately, 1979's *Dynasty*, which was the last Kiss album to feature Stanley, Simmons, Frehley and Criss). *Carnival Of Souls* limped apologetically to No.27 in the US, its grunge stylings already old hat.

No, the reunited Kiss still had something to prove. They needed to hit the studio and make a record that would properly crown their comeback. And that's when things *really* started to go wrong.

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Onstage in 1994 with pre-reunion guitarist Bruce Kulick.

In truth, the camaraderie that Ace Frehley talked about after Kiss's comeback show had worn off by the time they began work on their 18th album. Stanley and Simmons' initial plans to make an old school rock'n'roll record featuring all four members on every track swiftly fell by the wayside. According to engineer Mike Plotnikoff, the decision to use outside musicians was made by producer Bruce Fairbairn.

"Gene and Paul wanted it to be the original band, [but] when Bruce heard Ace and Peter play in pre-production, he thought to make the kind of record he wanted to make, Ace and Peter wouldn't cut it as players," Plotnikoff recalled.

In the end, all four members played together on just one track, the Frehley-sung Into The Void, though they all sang on the self-mythologising *You Wanted The Best*. For the rest of the album, Criss's drum parts were played by session man Kevin Valentine. Ace got a better deal, appearing on four tracks, Ironically, the man who would eventually replace him, Tommy Thayer, handled guitar on the rest of the album, with Bruce Kulick also pitching in on a couple of songs.

Unsurprisingly, neither Ace nor Peter were happy with the situation. "I wasn't invited to the studio," Frehley. "When you hear Paul and Gene talk about it, it's like I didn't show up. The reason I'm not on any of the songs is because I wasn't asked to be on them. I just wasn't invited to any of the sessions."

Paul Stanley had a different view of matters. "We tried to do a Kiss album, and it was an ill-fated attempt because there was no real band," he said. "For a band to make a great album, it has to share a common purpose, and we didn't have it."

The resulting album papered over the cracks. *Psycho Circus* wasn't the Kiss comeback album fans wanted, but it was far from catastrophic. Songs such as *You Wanted The Best*, *I Pledge Allegiance To The State Of Rock And Roll* and the bombastic title track called back to past glories, while the semi-orchestrated *Journey Of 1000 Years* provided an uncharacteristically brooding closer. The only bum note was *We Are One* - a treacly we're-in-in-it-together anthem that almost drowned in its own irony.

"The Farewell Tour was us wanting to put Kiss out of its misery. But we just had to get rid of Ace and Peter."

Paul Stanley

Tensions were kept on a low simmer during the subsequent world tour. Kicking off on Halloween 1998, the spectacular *Psycho Circus* stage set featured groundbreaking 3D visuals on the video screens, along with several tons of pyros every night. "We want to bring the fun back to rock'n'roll," Gene Simmons had proclaimed before the dates kicked off, and it certainly lived up to that promise.

But not everything was rosy in the garden. Ticket sales were slower than on the reunion tour, and a proposed second leg in 1999 never happened. Worse, Stanley and Simmons were becoming exasperated with Frehley and Criss.

"We brought those guys back and they were just completely apologetic and remorseful and thankful to be back," Stanley recalled. "And yet it wasn't too long after things started to happen again that they started doing the same stuff. And it just became ugly and no fun."

Drastic action was needed. In 2000, the band announced the Kiss Farewell Tour. Except it wasn't goodbye to Kiss – just to Ace and Peter.

"The farewell tour was us wanting to put Kiss out of its misery," said Stanley. "And for a while, honestly, we lost sight that we didn't have to stop – we had to get rid of them."

In fairness, Frehley and Criss didn't help themselves. The guitarist reportedly skipped rehearsals, blaming Lyme Disease. Worse, he failed to turn up on time before a show in California, forcing the band to fit out Tommy Thayer – by then Kiss's tour manager - in the Spaceman costume, ready to step on stage in his place.

"Ace walked into the dressing room about 20 minutes before the show was scheduled to start. He looked at Tommy – fully dressed and made up, with his guitar on, ready to go – and just said, 'Oh, hey Tommy, how you doin'?'" says Stanley

Criss was little better according to the singer. Following one show, Stanley was cornered by Doc McGhee who angrily told him the drummer was playing too slowly.

"This will not do," said McGhee. 'These guys are just terrible. You have to make changes."

For his part, Peter Criss was feeling just as frustrated. Breaking point for him came during a show in North Charleston, South Carolina. At the end of the set, Criss trashed his kit, sending a huge tom-tom drum rolling towards an unsuspecting Stanley. He quit the tour – and the band – that night, leaving his predecessor, Eric Singer, to finish the dates in his place. Criss would return again for another tour in 2002, but departed for the third and final time in 2004.

Unlike his colleague, Frehley made it to the end of the Farewell tour, but that was it for him too. He'd reached the end of the road with Kiss.

"They wanted to tour constantly and record constantly, over-merchandise the brand, and that made me crazy. I'm not a kid anymore," the guitarist later said. "Touring constantly can be very exhausting. I don't want to put myself in that position."

Paul Stanley had a different take on it. "I was angry at Peter and Ace for being disrespectful toward everything we had accomplished and everything the fans were giving us," he said. "It was unbearable."

In that war, there were only ever going to be two winners: Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons. Criss and Frehley were once again cut free from Kiss, and Thayer and Singer took their positions - and, more controversially, their make-up. Not that Paul and Gene cared what others thought. Sentiment was never an issue – not when the future of Kiss was at stake.

Sinner & Saint

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2001

During their early career, **Kiss** were despised by Americans who were fearful of the 'Satanic' antics of Gene and Co. As if answering the bible bashers' prayers, in 2001 Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley agreed it was time to leave the road forever. But was it really?

Dressed to kill: **Dave Ling**
Classic portraits: **Ross Halfin**

GENE Simmons and Paul Stanley have now been acquainted for more than 30 years. As Paul says: "The beauty of our relationship isn't that we always agree, but that we respect the other's opinion."

Last summer the pair concurred that it was time for Kiss to retire from the road. Having reunited with original guitarist Ace Frehley and drummer Peter Criss, they'd broken all box office records with their live shows, but delivered what was regarded as a poor studio comeback in 'Psycho Circus'. They were also forced to replace Criss with Eric Singer when the original sticksman loudly voiced his objections to the way the proceeds were being carved up. Rumour and counter-rumour have dogged the band's past several months.

So, grilling the pair separately, we gave Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley the chance to set the record completely straight…

What were your goals when you formed Kiss?
Gene: "Honestly, to get rich and get laid. And any rock star who tells you different is lying. Everybody yelling your name and paying for the privilege, girls wanting to have your children, and guys thinking you're cool."
Paul: "For a while I saw us being something akin to what the Pretty Things were doing at the time with 'S.F. Sorrow' [the first concept album, released by the Brit band in 1968]. Something orchestral, much more British than American. Initially I envisioned us as having two drummers and two of every instrument in the band, but it soon became clear it would be a guitar-driven, Humble Pie approach, with guitars chugging along and somebody wailing on top of it."

It's no great secret that the double concert album 'Alive' saved Kiss's backsides.
Gene: "It actually saved the record company's, too. It changed the way live albums were done, because up until then live records were not a radio or sales staple. Not only was our live album all of a sudden our biggest hit, but it was a double album. Then the word 'Alive' became synonymous with live records – right after us was 'Frampton Comes Alive', and then this alive, and that alive…"

Your manager at the time, Bill Aucoin, was past his credit card limit, and you were looking at bankruptcy. Were there moments when you feared your dream would never be realised?
Paul: "I did have a few moments of prayer where I said: "Dear God, now that you've let me taste a bit of the good life, don't take it from me." Once you've tasted the good life – good women, good food, whatever – your being is awakened in a way that you won't forget."
Gene: "I was oblivious. All I was aware of was that I wasn't working for a living. We weren't really checking our bank accounts, because we were touring 200 days each year. We were just glad to hop into bed – hopefully with someone – and do the same the next day. As you get older you start to wonder; when you're 20 you think life's eternal – unless you're a Jewish rock star who worries about money! Which was me.

"When the band first started, I wrote the cheques, because nobody else had any money. Somehow I'd amassed $23,000 before the band started. So I paid for the rehearsal hall when nobody had money, I chipped in for equipment, and often bought Ace and Peter hotdogs and lent them train money."

When did the pressure cooker situation with Ace begin to get out of hand?
Gene: " It's not fair to say it was just Ace. I started going out with Cher and then Diana Ross. And then I really succumbed to the Hollywood lifestyle. There was no drugs or booze, but my songwriting went to pot, and Paul and I became somewhat estranged.

"With Ace and Peter, because of the drugs, they became Jekyll and Hyde. When they were straight they were nice, but when they were high – which was most of the time – it was just torture. The chemicals fuelled the fire, and eventually heightened their lack of self-esteem. Suddenly, conspiratorial feelings began. All the time: "It's the Jews [Stanley and Simmons] against us." It'd be: "What are the Jews doing now?" in between bouts of Ace dressing up in his Nazi regalia. I'd like to think it was the drugs talking, and not him, because I'll say it in print: I hate Ace and Peter when they're high, and I love them when they're straight. Ace said that he had to leave the band or he was gonna kill himself. Peter likewise tried to hurt himself many times, smashing his wrists through glass windows and severing arteries. Between them they've had 20 car crashes! I told them: 'If you're going to do it, do it well. Take a gun or jump off a skyscraper; don't waste a nice car'."

Was it a relief to take the make-up off for 'Lick It Up'?
Paul: "For me it was, not because I didn't love the make-up but because we were on shaky ground [after all the line-up changes]. I thought our next guitarist might be giraffe boy, or our drummer the human snail. It'd gone from a band built on four personas to manufacturing personas for whoever came in. It lacked integrity. By the time of 'Creatures Of The Night' we were yearning to create a great album but being held back by the past."
Gene: "It was a very uncomfortable time for me. I gave in to the make-up totally on stage. I can talk about it openly now, but I was The Demon. I would feel stronger, I became fearless. Off stage I was afraid of heights, but I'd have no compunction to get on stage in my warpaint and be flown up to the top of the rafters, 50 feet above, at eight feet a second. When I got off stage, I'd think: 'Holy shit, that's high!'"

Gene, back in 1992 you said you'd made, "an H-bomb-sized mistake," in pursuing your acting and other non-musical activities.
Gene: "Absolutely. Unfortunately, as much as I like to think that, in the patois of the street, I'm 'all that', I'm not. There are so many hours in the day, and each one spent acting detracts from the band. But sometimes you're willing to pay the price, and I was willing then.

"I'm also going to try it again. I'll start another record label and go back into acting, certainly producing. I've got tons of movies in development, one with Tim Allen, Tom Greene, Kevin Costner. I want to do the lot."

In the mid-80s, you seemed unwilling to respond to the fact that Kiss's place in the market had changed. You played two half-full shows at Wembley, when one night would have been a comfortable sell-out.
Gene: "But you get the respect if you demand it. You don't wait for the public to define who and what you are. You could do one night and you wanna make sure they think you could do two nights, so you do two. Life is money – you get up in the morning and take a breath and it costs you money. You have to invest in the things you believe in."

It seems that Paul was certainly the keeper of the Kiss flame during the 1980s.
Gene: "He was, and he did it alone. But I had to do what I did. I'd already had an offer from a record company to produce a new song for Jerry Lee Lewis, which was a dream. I'd also discovered Van Halen. Every time a new band wanted me to produce them I was told I couldn't. Finally I thought: 'I gotta'."
Paul: "I did my best to keep Kiss alive. It may not have been perfect, but the alternative would've been the band's demise, and I wasn't about to let that happen."

How did it feel to restore the make-up? Was there the tiniest thought that it was an indignity?
Paul: "No! I was so excited, because it'd come full circle. We'd started something great together, and seen it all go down the drain. To me, that was a sin. For everyone to know that this time there were no rules or boundaries made it a very exciting time."

Did you have sympathy for Bruce Kulick and Eric Singer, who'd been trusted allies?
Paul: "Absolutely. They worked hard and they got paid well. Our 'Unplugged' show couldn't have been pulled off by any other line-up, but they were up against a freight train. There was no way to stop what they saw coming. Once there was an inkling that there could be a reunion, they knew that it was pointless to fight it."

Gene: "The fans wanted Ace and Peter. And at the time they seemed reasonably healthy compared to the psychotic rock stars of their heyday. Paul and I sat Bruce and Eric down while we were recording 'Carnival Of Souls', and told them there was a possibility the original line-up would unite. We didn't want them to hear it from anybody else first. In fact, as soon as we started rehearsing, Ace started fucking up again – not showing up, or breaking his shoelaces. There were always excuses. So I sent a fax to their manager saying: "That's it, we're pulling the plug. Go back to playing clubs, we're not interested any more'."

How did Ace and Peter end up returning?
Gene: "Through an intermediary, I got a phone call from Peter asking if he could come down to the first Kiss convention, because his daughter had never seen anything to do with Kiss. So I said sure, and we sent a limo.

"It was our then drummer, Eric Singer, who suggested that Peter sit in for a song or two. So Peter tried rehearsing, but his drumming just wasn't good enough. Peter and the fans will be angry when they read that, but it's true. So Peter just sang, and Eric played drums. Apparently, Peter called Ace and said:
"I don't know what our problems were in the past, but I just had a great time. You should do it, too." Ace joined us In New York for the unplugged thing. We rehearsed for two or three days, and Ace and Peter seemed to have cleaned up their act chemically.

"So I flew to New York and spoke to their manager – who used to be our bodyguard – and told him there would be no negotiation, we'd make them an offer. We were unwilling to be tortured again by two guys who felt that if they were miserable, then the whole world should be miserable with them. They had to keep their problems to themselves, show up on time and try to be professional. But as soon as they got back on the road, it was torture. The phoenix rose from the ashes, and out of bankruptcy all of a sudden the guys were doing very, very well. When it came to doing the record ['Psycho Circus'], they wanted to renegotiate the contract, and so for most of that record those guys never even showed up. We used different drummers and players, and finally at the end they joined and I tried to make the best of it.

"I wrote a song for Ace that appeared on the Japanese version, it just didn't turn out quite good enough for the American one. Ace brought in six songs that the producer, Bruce Fairbairn – who's since passed on – turned down. Ace and Peter always thought there was some kind of conspiracy going on, but just being in the band isn't reason enough for you to have a song on the record."

The subsequent tour was spectacularly successful, but it must have been a gruelling experience.
Gene: "Look, you're travelling in your own private jet, you don't have to pack your own stuff. You just rest for the rest of the day, get on your jet, get up and play the show. But Peter was suffering from insomnia, and Ace would doze off and start drooling in his sleep on the jet, in the middle of sentences. So the dirty laundry made it gruelling. Many, many times we had to send warning letters to lawyers."

'Psycho Circus', was mauled by the critics.
Paul: "I'm living in a house that bad reviews built – and you should see my house! But I'm very, very proud of that album, and I won't say that about every album we've done. "

Did Peter Criss end up leaving Kiss because 'the Jews' were taking the lion's share of the money?
Gene: "That's a pretty accurate appraisal. Except that Peter is still in the band, he just didn't come with us to Australia and Japan. He wanted more than we were willing to give. He received advice that we wouldn't go without him, and it was horrifically wrong. And I'm really sorry Peter didn't go. He'd have enjoyed it."

Was the rumour that Criss incorporated a teardrop into his make-up as a protest at the way he felt he was being treated true?
Gene: "Yes, but the protest should really have been with Peter's miserable life. He's been through three divorces, countless accidents, it's just amazing he's alive. The tear Peter's shedding is for himself. Never sign an agreement that you don't agree to. For him to paint a tear on his face was embarrassing – if you don't like the job, don't work there."

Criss also says that he didn't want Kiss to be the guest that overstayed their welcome at the party.
Gene: "But Peter never believed in the concept of Kiss. He always prided himself in being a musician. But nobody in this band is a virtuoso. In fact, Peter's probably the less musically adept of all four of us. Even when his own producer, Vini Poncia, was brought in to produce Kiss, he stated that Peter shouldn't play drums on the album [1979's 'Dynasty']. Peter never bought into the idea of the Cat Man, he just thought it was kids' stuff. You're damn right it is, Peter, but it's loved by millions and millions of kids."

Peter also said that certain members didn't play on certain tracks on 'Psycho Circus'.
Paul: "There's bliss in ignorance. Anyone who ever believed that every band member played on every Kiss song is a fool. Sometimes a fantasy element is

"I'M LIVING IN A HOUSE THAT BAD REVIEWS BUILT – YOU SHOULD SEE MY HOUSE!"
PAUL STANLEY DOESN'T CARE FOR CRITICS

attached to being in a band. The Beatles all living together in a bunch of flats in Help? That's absurd."

Gene: "In 1984, I'd had to cut my hair and had to go onstage in a wig, which was devastating. But there was no way around it. Nowadays, everybody seems surprised that this or that guy has got hair extensions; but welcome to life.

"You know that girl who's walking around with huge tits? She bought 'em. Things are not always what they seem. The Kiss guitarists? No, that's Gene Simmons playing rhythm on 'War Machine', 'Christine Sixteen' and 'Almost Human'. And the bass on some songs, like 'Creatures Of The Night'? No, that's not Gene. I didn't play bass on 'I Still Love You', that was Eric Carr, because he had a better feel. And Eric Carr didn't play drums on 'I', from '…The Elder', that was Alan Schwarzberg. Why? It sounded better!"

While you're giving away trade secrets, wasn't Ace's place secretly filled by tour manager Tommy Thayer on certain nights during the reunion tour?

Gene: "He never actually physically got up on stage. Ace was also trying to renegotiate his contract mid-tour, and at one show, in California, Tommy was in full make-up ready to go up on stage. Ace rented a helicopter, and barely got there on time. Ace is convinced to this day that Tommy wouldn't have gone on, but he's wrong."

What's Ace's status within the band right now?

Gene: "We've just closed the touring cycle, I've cut off all my hair, I'm about to act in a couple of things, but Kiss is alive and well. As far as we're concerned, Ace and Peter are both absolutely in the band; this is like a home. And Ace is certainly in the band. If you want to have a solo career or tour, do whatever you want, nobody's your boss."

In the Crüe book, The Dirt, Nikki Sixx relates how Kiss kicked Mötley off a support tour for bad behaviour, but years later Gene tried to obtain rights for all eternity to make their book into a film.

Gene: "They were crack-ups, and I mean that in the crack sense. But I've always been very fond of that band. I have nothing bad to say about them, except that anybody that uses drugs is an idiot. I didn't offer them money to turn their story into a film. I'm Jewish, you see. You pay me, I don't pay you. But I did offer Nikki the opportunity. I said: "I can make a Mötley Crüe bio-film, a movie of the week on TV, if you want it." He said he would think about it, but he never got back to me. But in terms of them getting kicked off the tour, that's not true. They were only signed on for four shows, and that was it. Incidentally, they came on and did very well."

Do you have plans for life after Kiss's eventual farewell performance, Paul?

Paul: "No, because Kiss can call it a day in some form, but Kiss will never end. The fans would never let Kiss die, and neither will we. There are always great offers. I've been asked to do Phantom Of The Opera again, maybe even in London this time. But I always pass on more things than I try."

Paul, although there's considerable evidence to the contrary, the rumour that you're gay never quite goes away. Does that bother you?

Paul: [Hooting with laughter] "As you tried to preface it, I thought: "God, that's so preposterous." I've always believed that the guy who's most suspicious is the one who's constantly flexing his muscles. If you're really comfortable with who you are, you can wear a dress and still be a man. I respect anybody's lifestyle, providing it doesn't involve minors. And by that I mean children. Miners? Great – whatever floats your boat!

"But I've never seen a man that's a close second for a woman. I love women on every level, from aesthetics down to their minds. So no, I'm not gay, yet I understand the question.

"I find it hysterical, because I can't tell you how many times I've been in bed with a woman who'd say: 'My boyfriend told me you were gay.' And I said: 'Well, now you know why.'"

How certain are you that this really is the end for Kiss? I mean, you vowed you'd never take the make-up off, and then you promised you'd never put it on again, so…

Paul: "So many bands have a lifespan that's three to five years, and what they say often turns out to be the truth because they don't get a second chance. With a band that has a 30-year career, what you say is true when you say it. Did I ever think for a moment that we were gonna get back with Ace and Peter? No way. It was said with complete integrity."

Gene: "Right now it is the end. Physically, the strain of our live show is much more telling than for other bands. Every step I take is on eight inches of platform dragon boots, dragging around 50 pounds of armour, studs and leather.

"I love doing it, but it would certainly be a lot easier to be Keith Richards.

"One final thing I want to say is that being in a band is like your family. Kiss fight like cats and dogs about the same things you do – money and who's in charge – but if anybody raises a hand to a family member you kill them. Likewise, I'll destroy anybody who picks on anybody else in the band. But because I too am in the band, I reserve the right to say whatever the fuck I want."

"WHEN THEY WERE HIGH, WHICH WAS MOST OF THE TIME, IT WAS TORTURE."

GENE SIMMONS ON ACE AND PETER

Paul Stanley: "I don't want to be nostalgic. I just want to be great. I just want to be Kiss."

Sonically speaking

Great expectations surrounded the release of **Kiss**'s 2009 album *Sonic Boom*. "I wasn't interested in making a half-assed record," a defiant **Paul Stanley** told *Classic Rock* at the time…

Words: **Geoff Barton** Pictures: **Neil Zlozower**

"The record industry is dead. It's six feet underground."

Thus spoke Gene Simmons at Kiss's Download 2008 press conference. The assembled hacks wept into their Kiss Kleenex, gnawed their Kiss Biros and squirmed in their Kiss deckchairs as the bassist/vocalist continued his rant. Clearly agitated, Simmons explained that his band were refusing to record new material until illegal downloading ceases, calling the act "uncivilised".

Well, it's now a little over a year later… and guess what's due to hit the stores on October 6? A brand spanking new Kiss studio album, that's what. Eleven freshly recorded songs for you – and Gene, no doubt – to drool over.

Illegal downloading certainly hasn't ceased, in fact it's as rife as it ever was. So what in tarnation happened?

"Well, I may have a lot of talents but I'm certainly not a ventriloquist," chuckles Paul Stanley. "Gene wasn't speaking for me, or us. Sometimes he dives in headfirst. For me, it was only ever a matter of: if we are ever going to do another Kiss album, I want to be in charge. That was always the prerequisite for me, whether there was a market for it or not. I simply wasn't interested in doing a half-assed Kiss album."

Stanley is in Las Vegas, vacationing with his family before, he says, "all hell breaks loose," unwittingly name-checking a track from Kiss's *Lick It Up* album. His phone buzzes constantly during our chat, its ringtone alternating between Led Zeppelin's *Good Times Bad Times* and *Black Dog*. ("How cool is that? That says everything when your phone rings *Black Dog*, huh?")

The view from the Starchild's penthouse hotel suite is spectacular: serried rows of skyscrapers with their bolt-on casinos basking in the haze of the early-morning Nevada sunshine. Stripped of its night-time neon blanket, many people reckon Vegas is tawdry by daylight. We suppose the same could be said of Kiss without make-up. But Stanley, for one, looks in fine fettle to us. Tousled black hair, crisp white shirt, distressed denim trousers, lounging on a white leather sofa as big as a battleship.

"It wasn't difficult to talk Gene around," the rhythm guitarist/vocalist insists. "It was interesting that everyone was very, very positive about the idea [of making a new album]. The ground-rules were laid down and I have to say that Gene was selfless – which is not characteristic of him. He was a team player and dedicated to putting his all into it. I expected everyone to commit 100 per cent. And they did."

The result is *Sonic Boom*, Kiss's first studio offering since 1998's *Psycho Circus*. Stanley is calling it "bar none our best album in 30 years, if not our best album period". A newly enthused Gene Simmons reckons "it may be our best album since *Destroyer* – it's *Rock And Roll Over* meets *Love Gun*". Classics all, indubitably, but these are highly ambitious claims. Aren't Kiss setting themselves up for a fall?

"Well," Stanley considers, "I've listened to *Sonic Boom* from beginning to end many times – as you can imagine, because I produced it – and I can't remember an album we've done that's as consistent. The batteries are fully recharged.

"The problem in bands sometimes is that you have to compromise based on issues other than quality of music. You end up trying to satisfy band members' demands for equality. You wind up with hurt feelings. And all that does is weaken an album. *Sonic Boom* doesn't have that; *Sonic Boom* has 11 great tracks. If it wasn't great, it didn't get recorded. It literally didn't get past the rehearsal point."

Lapsing into his on-stage role as the platform-booted rock'n'roll preacher, Stanley proclaims: "This wasn't an exercise in pandering, or stroking somebody's insecurities or neuroses, this was about making a great album that is unequivocally Kiss."

Of course, the passage of time will determine

"Do I think we're like Mickey Mouse? I'd rather find a better comparison. But we're certainly iconic." – *Paul Stanley*

Sonic Boom's eventual resting place in the Kiss kanon. But having heard the new album, the first flush of listening frenzy doesn't give us cause to dispute Stanley's claims. The band promised us a balls-to-the-wall, back-to-their-roots album and that, it appears, is exactly what we've got.

"If I find fault with any of Kiss's early records, it's the sonic quality of them," Stanley reflects. "I was never a fan of the range of fidelity of those first few albums, so there's certainly more bombast, if you like, to *Sonic Boom*. I didn't want to make a retro album. I don't want to be nostalgic. I just want to be great. I just want to be Kiss.

"We recorded *Sonic Boom* in the old-fashioned, analogue way," he continues. "I have nothing against ProTools; it's a technological marvel. However, the great albums that you and I love were not made under a microscope. They were made by living, breathing people who were excited by what they were doing. Looking at a graph on a computer screen while you're recording a song is absurd. Great music is decided by your ears, not your eyes."

The on-sale date of *Sonic Boom* more or less coincides with release of *Anomaly*, the new solo album by ex-Kiss guitarist Ace Frehley. Does Stanley regard that as unfortunate timing?

"For who? Look, it's a hard question for me to answer. *Sonic Boom* took us months to do. Ace's album, from what I understand, took him 15 or 20 years. I can't say anything about the timing or the release schedule. All I can say is, I hope Ace is happy and I think it's terrific that he's alive. Anything else is a bonus. I wish him well."

The names might change but the faces stay the same. Tommy Thayer took over Ace's Spaceman role in 2002 and Eric Singer, who had enjoyed two previous stints in Kiss, reclaimed the Kitty Kat drum-stool from Peter Criss in 2004. *Sonic Boom* sees the pair stepping boldly out of their sideman shadows, Singer contributing lead vocals on *All For The Glory*, Thayer writing and singing lead on *When Lighting Strikes*. Stanley says plainly: "Well, Tommy and Eric have a lot to offer, y'know? Anybody who saw our recent shows through Europe, South America and Canada knows that the band as it stands today is vital and pretty lethal."

The cover to *Sonic Boom* echoes the artwork of Kiss's *Rock And Roll Over* album, released in 1977. The same artist did both: Michael Doret. Why him and not the guy many reckon to be *the* Kiss album cover maestro, Ken (*Destroyer, Love Gun*) Kelly?

"Ken did great covers but it wasn't the way to go this time. I thought we needed something more graphic. I wanted a cover that, as soon as you saw it, would emotionally or viscerally make you know what was on the inside of the album. I wanted somebody who connected us to what some people think are our finest times. So I sat with Michael and just thought this would be the way to go.

"Also," Stanley qualifies, "Ken Kelly has connections with… I can't remember the name, the band with the loincloths and all that stuff [Manowar]. All that barbarian nonsense."

Most of Kiss's key albums contain a killer ballad, something that's missing on *Sonic Boom*. "Yes, purposely," Stanley reveals. "It was too predictable: the obligatory ballad. We did have a great song – and Eric was very keen on singing it. But it wasn't necessary. What was important was to capture the vitality and the focus of some of the earlier Kiss albums – and I think that's what we did."

Classic Rock had its first listen of *Sonic Boom* in the company of Doc McGhee, Kiss's manager. Reflecting on his charges' longevity, McGhee compared them to James Bond – and also Mickey Mouse. Is Stanley comfortable with the latter analogy? "Um, it wouldn't be the one that first comes to mind. Do I think we're like Mickey Mouse? I would rather find a better comparison. But we're certainly iconic – whatever that means, however you define that."

Kiss made headlines earlier this year when they put their fans in charge of routing their US and Canadian tours. Rumour has it the same tactic will be employed next year when they return to play the UK. Isn't this rather dangerous? They could end up with gigs in Grimsby and Darlington.

"I can remember when we literally played every block in England – I think it might have been the *Adrenalize* tour," Stanley laughs. "No decisions have been made on us doing a fan-routed British trek. But who knows, if it does happen we might end up playing Stafford Bingley Hall again [scene of triumphant Kiss shows in the early 1980s]. What a magical place that was. That was spectacular."

Right on cue, a huge chunk of Vegas neon sparks into life just beyond the penthouse window.

"That was spectacular," Stanley repeats.

Well, he should know. After all, 'spectacular' has been Kiss's mantra for 35 years or more…

THIS GOES UP TO 11

Paul Stanley's track-by-track run-down of Kiss's *Sonic Boom*.

★ Modern Day Delilah
It's a great way to start. We wanted to kick our way into the door with something that said: "We're alive and deadly." It has all the hallmarks of us at our best.

★ Russian Roulette
It's one of those great personality songs for Gene. It was important on the album that Gene reclaimed Gene, if you know what I mean. I love it when he sings: *'Some ladies love me, some ladies don't, but I know what you're gonna do, even when you say you won't.'*

★ Never Enough
That's your full-charge anthem. It's classic Kiss. I can't say enough about Tommy and Eric. They're so much a part of this team, and so much a part of why this album is what it is. Tommy's playing is perfect in that it's familiar and yet it's not an impersonation [of Ace Frehley]. Let's face it; the guy can play his ass off. Eric the same. Kudos to those guys. They are a big part of the reason why we could do this album.

★ Yes I Know (Nobody's Perfect)
It's kind of *Ladies Room*. It's got that vibe to it. It's that classic up-tempo Gene kind of song. It was fun to record and it's just one of those tracks that make you smile.

★ Stand
Everyone in Kiss is a real big Anglophile, and this is like a cross between *God Gave Rock And Roll To You* and Mott The Hoople's *All The Young Dudes*. It's a flag-waver.

★ Hot And Cold
In some ways it reminds me of *Calling Dr Love*. Again, it's one of those defining Gene songs. There's a great guitar solo in there – I love Tommy's solo.

★ All For The Glory
Eric sings this one. He's got a very classic voice. It's a full-on track, as opposed to the 'let's do the sentimental track for the drummer' type of song.

★ Danger Us
A flat-out, relentless rocker. It's one of Gene's favourites. Great playing, great lyric: *'Two parts trouble, double-down tough, danger you, danger me, danger us.'*

★ I'm An Animal
Great riff, great delivery from Gene. I believe you described it as 'Zeppelinesque' in your preview on the *Classic Rock* website. Well, I say thank you very much.

★ When Lightning Strikes
Everybody will be pretty surprised to hear Tommy's lead vocal on this. He really delivers the goods.

★ Say Yeah
It's got a big hook and a major amount of attitude. It's a great track to end on.

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"Donald Trump is jealous of Gene Simmons"

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2010

So says **Gene Simmons** himself. After all, he is the man who has smooched with Cher and Diana Ross, discovered Eddie Van Halen and gets called "Mr Kiss" by Bob Dylan. And these are the stories that prove his contact book is better than anyone else's.

Words: **Chris Ingham** Portrait: **Mick Hutson at Getty**

When Kiss lumbered on to the scene in 1974 with their self-titled debut album, no one could've predicted how much a part of popular culture their bat-winged, fire-breathing, blood-drooling totem, Gene Simmons, would become.

When Simmons – born Chaim Witz in Israel, the son of Hungarian Jews – relocated to New York at a young age he immediately embraced the American dream. As Kiss's career exploded – quite literally – the bassist/vocalist proved he was no shock-rock novelty act, masterminding an extensive merchandising range and helping transform the band into a global business.

Simmons's larger-than-life personality helped him inveigle his way into rarefied social circles, and he enjoyed unlikely love affairs with a couple of the world's top female singers. Most recently the Demon has ventured into the realm of reality TV with his own series, *Gene Simmons Family Jewels*.

Mover, shaker, money-maker, whatever Gene says or does, he's bound to set tongues a-wagging…

LOU REED

[Producer] Bob Ezrin started rehearsing with us for the *Destroyer* record in 1975 and he had just come off working with Lou Reed on *Berlin*. We rehearsed in a place called Carol's on 42nd Street and 6th Avenue in New York City. Lou walked in and I'd been aware of, and had been a big fan of, *Walk On The Wild Side*, which was produced by David Bowie and Mick Ronson. Reed walks in, we're rehearsing, trying to work out songs, and Bob says that he would like Lou to work on lyrics with us and maybe get another angle. But it didn't work out, actually, and we went off and did *Destroyer*, because we couldn't wait to put all these new songs down, like *Detroit Rock City* and *Flaming Youth* and all that.

So then the next time Bob Ezrin worked with us was on *(Music From) The Elder* [1981], which had the best of all intentions but was misdirected. It was intended for the band to kind of move inward, to write something that meant something, and I take full responsibility [for it being a commercial disaster]. It was my concept, the title, the ideal and the idea, the story line. I wanted to do a motion picture.

As we were working on it, Paul [Stanley] came in with something called *Every Little Bit Of My Heart* or something like that, it was sort of a pop ditty, and we tried to work it up but it was too pop. Lou came up to King's City in Toronto and we sat around and he scribbled away on song title ideas and so on, and everyone immediately focused in on *A World Without Heroes*. It just felt like the song could write itself. So we took the chordal progression of Paul's *Every Little Bit Of My Heart* and the line *'A world without heroes… it's no place for me… it's like a bird without wings…'* and it's pretty poignant. That was Lou's contribution, just the title, so he got a songwriting credit.

FRANK ZAPPA

I knew his son, Dweezil, socially and he actually learned to play guitar from a guitar player I discovered… Eddie Van Halen. So it all comes full circle somehow. Dweezil actually brought me over to see Frank before he passed away and we started to talk about stuff – music and life philosophies and so on, and after he passed away it was his family that actually gathered around the idea of doing something post his passing.

I asked if they had any unfinished Frank pieces because I'd love to finish them and get the family around, and so we came together on *Black Tongue*, which was Frank's title, not mine. I had this 30-second bit that I built an entire song on, this loop, and I played all the instruments and got all the Zappa family in. It was the only song in the entire Zappa history where the entire remaining family members actually sang around the same mic.

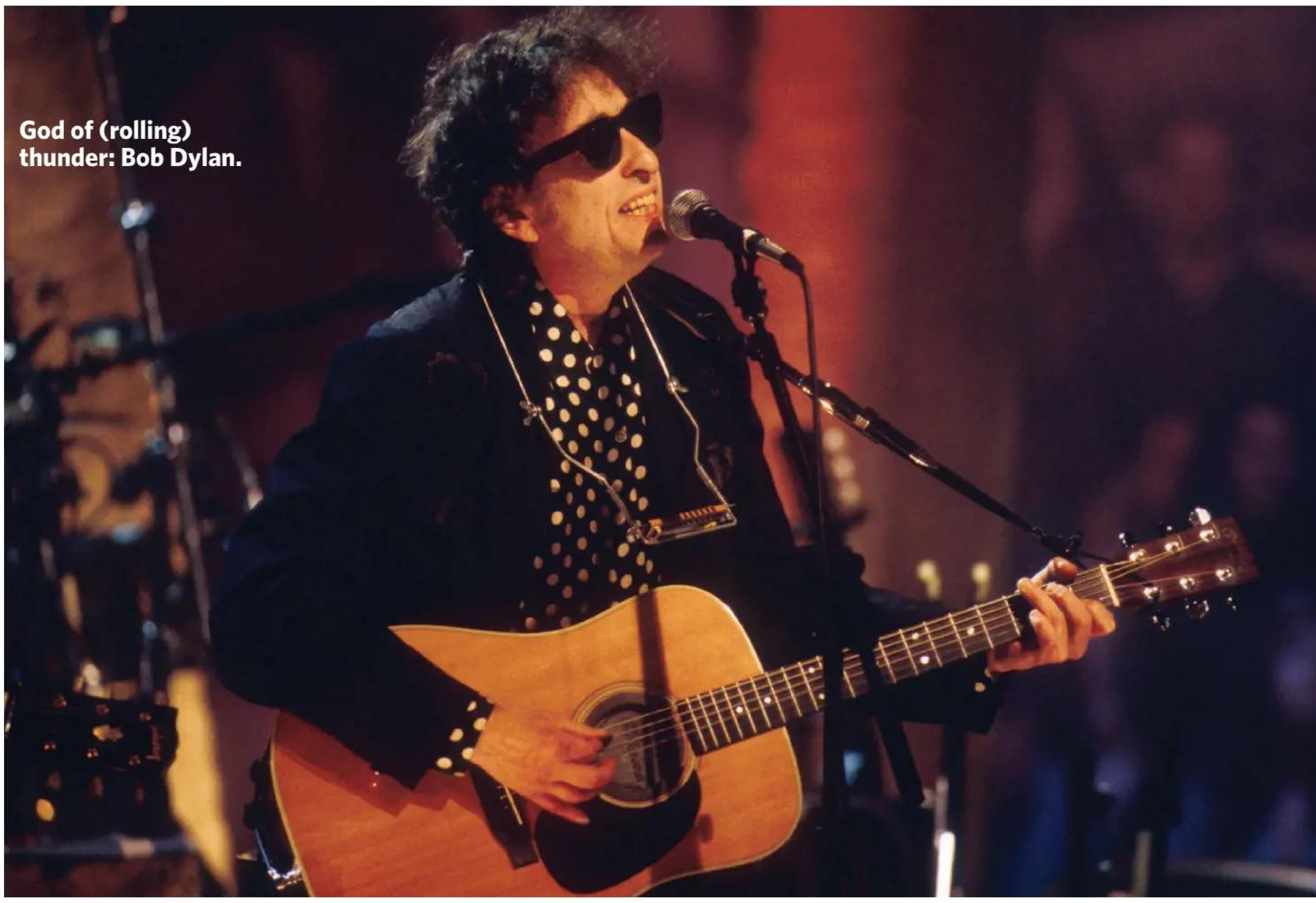
BOB DYLAN

Next to Zappa one of the other pivotal people for me is Bob Dylan. There's certainly no greater lyricist in pop culture. But Dylan is classic poetry to me. And I'll never forget, he got on the phone to me out of the blue one day. I go, "Hey Bob" and he's like, "Hey, alright, Mr Kiss!" Always called me Mr Kiss. Even to this day, he won't call me Gene Simmons. I say, "How you doing?" and he says, [something incoherent and Bob-like]. "Uh, what did you say, Bob?" [Laughs] His voice is instantly recognisable; no other human being has ever had that sound. You can't quite figure out what country it's from, never mind which town.

But I have the tapes, I recorded the whole thing. "Gee, I wanna write with you, Bob." "Alright, man…" [more Dylan-esque gibberish] and I'm thinking, "Does he want to know what time and where?" So I say, "How about so-and-so on this day?" He says, "Sure." And sure enough, there he was. A little van pulls up, and we both pulled out acoustic guitars… actually, one acoustic and one electric, because I haven't a second acoustic. I tossed around an idea and he says, "How about this? Try and do that." I sang a melody against his lyric and the tune happened fast, about 45 minutes. But of course, there were no lyrics, just a sense of melody and a chordal structure, and then Bob was gone. That was in 1994, and it took me eight or nine years. I kept badgering Bob, "Write the lyric!" "No, Mr Kiss, you write the lyric!" "Bob, you write the lyric! That's why I called you!" "No, man, you gotta [gibberish]." Anyway I couldn't

Gene indicates the number of f**ks he's given through his career.

get him to write the lyric, so finally, in desperation, when I had my solo record come out, I actually finished the lyric because I couldn't wait any longer. Bob liked it. It's called *Waiting For The Morning Light*, about a guy on the road, sees the picture of his love next to the telephone and here he is staying up all night, you know, waiting for the morning light.



God of (rolling) thunder: Bob Dylan.

CHER

Cher had just signed to Casablanca. Kiss were the first act on Casablanca, but she was gonna do a disco record. The label president asked if I'd come by for Governor Brown, some kind of charity event, and also he wanted to introduce me to Cher. So I said, "Great, sure!" So I got there; I was just scouting to see who was there and I wanted more people for my solo record.

Cher, in the meantime, was forced to go to the party that she didn't want to go to by Chastity, her daughter who was a big Kiss fan. Chastity told her, "You've got to go to this thing, Gene Simmons is going to be there!" So when she got there, I walked up and said, "Hi, I'm Gene Simmons." But she looked confused. She was off-centre because she thought it was the female Jean Simmons in movies. Cher had no idea that the Kiss thing had infected her household through her kids; especially Chastity, who wore the make-up and did all that stuff, and Elijah too when he was little.

Literally that first night I said, "You wanna come with me?" So she hopped in the limo and off we went. It started that fast. Hey, you want my advice when it comes to women, it's this: say what you mean and mean what you say. If you see a beautiful girl and you find her attractive, say those words.

DIANA ROSS

I was going to buy Cher a Christmas present. By that time we were not living together and I was off touring, but I wanted to buy her something. But what do you buy someone who has everything? Cher said, "Call my best friend, Diana. I tell her all my secrets and she knows exactly what I want!" So when I was in New York, I rang Diana up and said, "Would you help me?" When I met her at her apartment she gave me a slice of chocolate cake… and then she gave me a different slice of chocolate cake. It happened very fast.

Thereafter Cher and Diana weren't such good friends. But I continued to be close to both and valued our time together. The word 'lady' in the dictionary has photos of both of them. I had my own place in New York but I was living with Diana too, and Cher was often coming to New York to do her acting thing. Cher didn't want to stay in the city alone so I said, "Stay at my place."

And so sometimes I'd stay with Cher at my place and sometimes I'd stay at Diana's place. Everyone complicates things. Just simplify it and be clear with everybody. The only thing that bothers women is the dishonesty and not being clear. You see a Rottweiler coming towards you, it's very clear what's going on. You have to get out of the way because it's a Rottweiler. so it's clear. You see a French poodle and then it bites you, you're pissed off! Be clear about who you are.

MICHAEL JACKSON

I knew Michael. I ran into him a few times. I met him the first time before he became the superstar, when he was sort of teenagey, when he was still

"Well, you know, where there's smoke there's fire. There's no question in my mind that Michael Jackson molested those kids. Not a doubt."

a Jackson Five. This was in the Cher days, when Cher and I lived together.

I remember this shy kid who knew his stuff and actually suggested we did a record with this guy called Mutt Lange, who he liked very much. So, yeah, he knew his stuff. It would have been a great record.

Once when I was managing Liza Minnelli's recording career, she was playing Universal Amphitheater and Michael came to pay his respects because she was one of his childhood idols. I don't remember if he walked in with Elizabeth Taylor or Sophia Loren… either one… and we both just hung out and shot the shite.

When I lived with Diana Ross, it was she who brought me to the Encino Compound and I joined Michael as he went to a corner juice place and had a glass of orange. That was all he had to eat that day. He fasted two, sometimes three days a week. That was his regimen. I was always taken by his

I got you babe: Cher, one of Simmons's former squeezes.

CHER: ARMANDO PIETRANGELI/REX FEATURES BOB DYLAN: FRANK MICELOTTA/GETTY

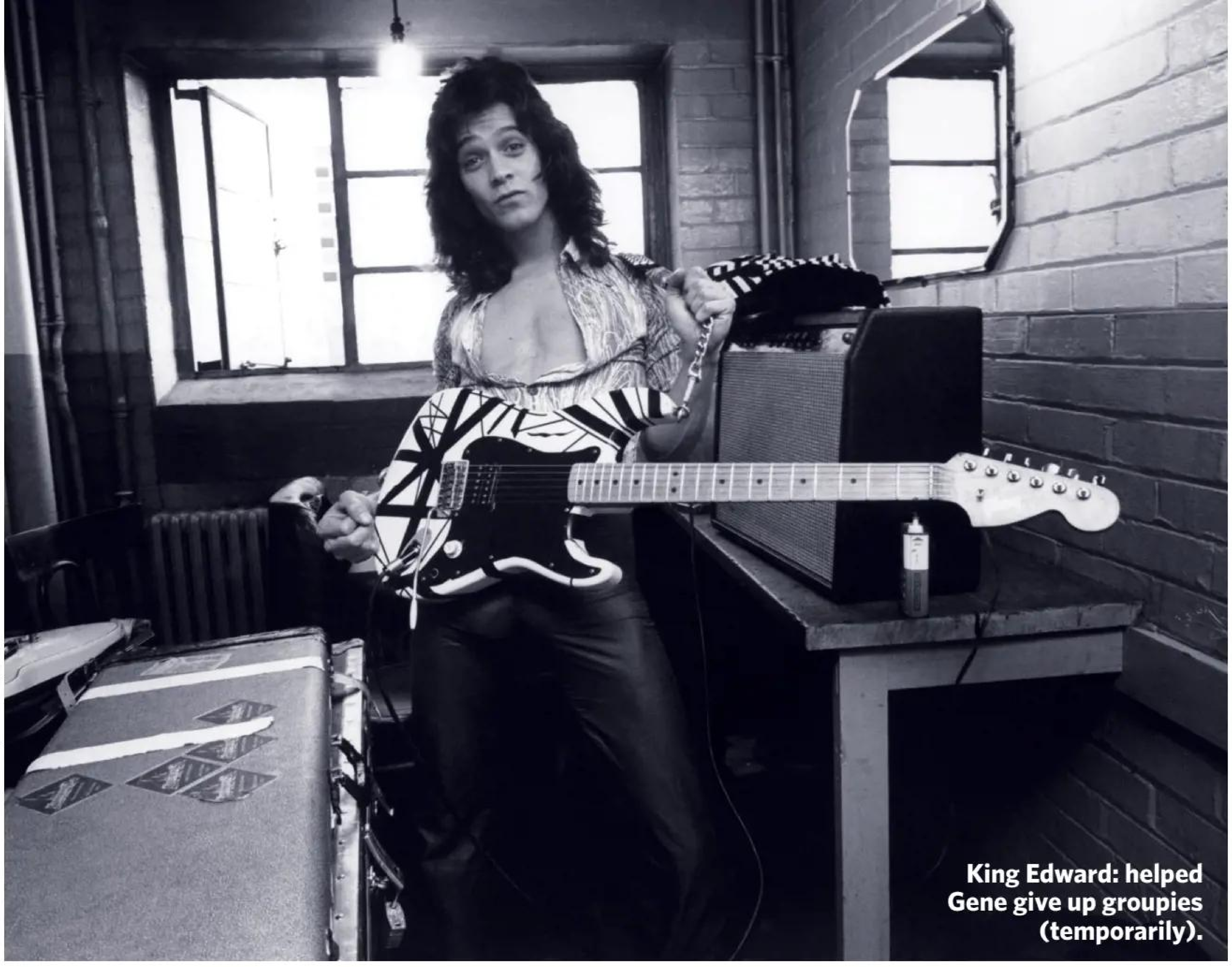
innocence and he was always very polite and kind.

But as time moved on, and no matter what my fond memories and fond images of Michael were, with one allegation of paedophilia after another and another and another… Oh dear. I knew some of the musicians he toured with, and specifically one who quit because of seeing boys coming out of the hotel rooms. And then you factor in that his travel agent was put on the stand and in court said that she was authorised to fly to Brazil and bring boys back to America for him… Well, you know, where there's smoke there's fire. There's no question in my mind he molested those kids. Not a doubt.

What we do know is Michael settled for $20 or $25 million to keep one suit dead and the other one was $3 or $4 million. Now what $25 million dollars means is if somebody said the most vile thing about me and I paid a lawyer $500,000 a year, I could defend that case for 50 years for the amount of money that Michael paid to make it go away.

Michael's on tape going, "Give the kids Jesus juice." Which is wine. I mean, it's just endless. So on one hand he's a sad kind of a character who seems to have been lonely… And incidentally, there's never been a single female of any age that I've ever known about who has ever made a claim that she has had a physical relationship with Michael, ever. In fact, while he was alive, I never heard about mature men ever making that claim either – and believe me, you can't keep it a secret. If you're a celebrity, somebody somewhere will say, "Oh yeah, I shagged him."

The only sexual references ever made about Michael Jackson that were made by anyone, anywhere around the world, have always been made by kids, and specifically males usually 10 to 14 years of age; never females, that age or older, and never grown men. Oh, I don't think this is going away any time soon.



King Edward: helped Gene give up groupies (temporarily).

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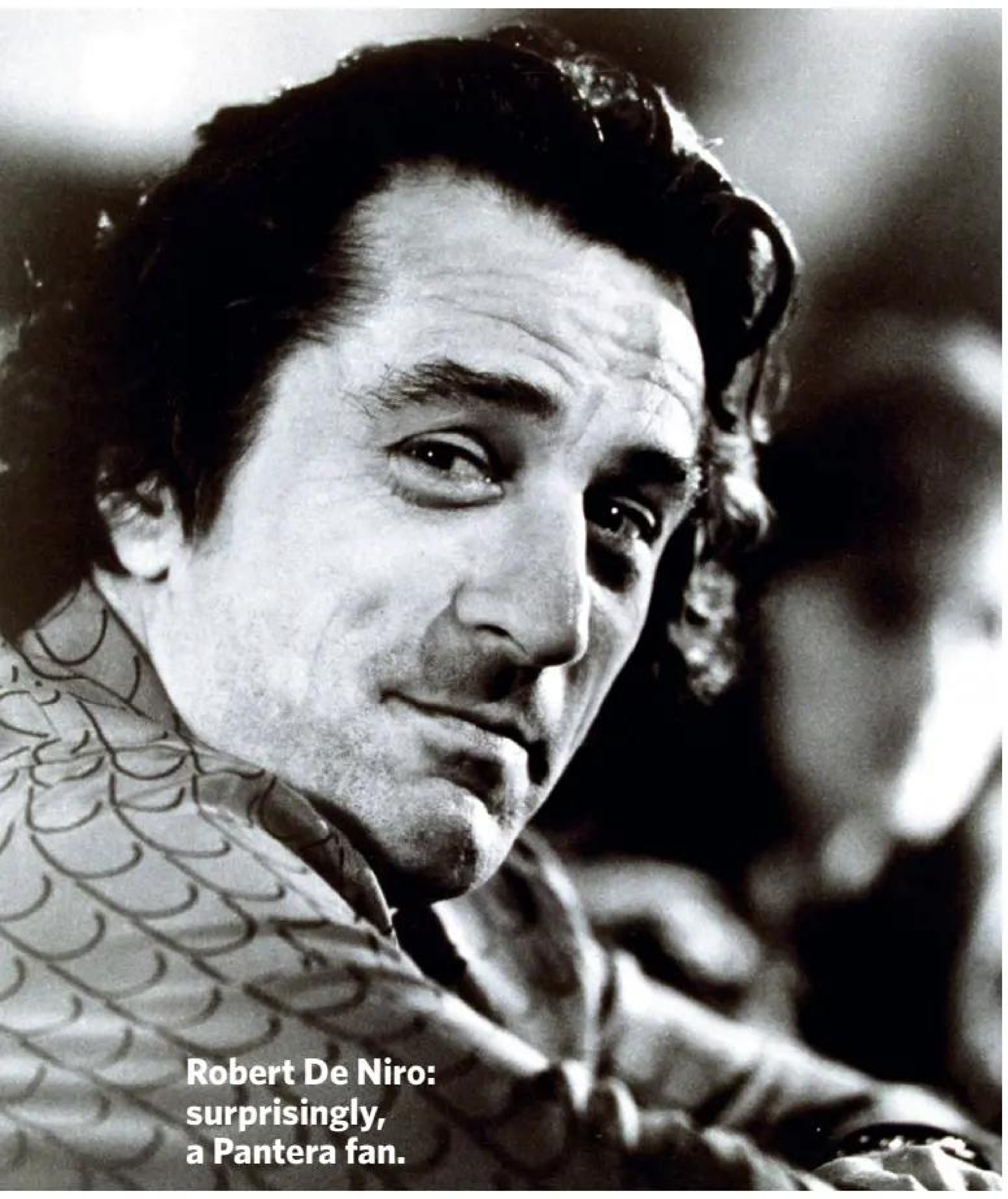

Robert De Niro: surprisingly, a Pantera fan.

EDDIE VAN HALEN

Edward, as Edward likes to be called. I went to see The Boyzz play at a place called the Starwood, and the first band is a group called Van Halen. By the second song they had knocked me out. I was like, "What the hell? Look at the guitar player, look at the singer doing acrobatics and stuff!" So immediately I was waiting for them backstage. I even curtailed my groupie activity – they were that good!

When I got there, Edward and David [Lee Roth] and all the guys – they were babies – were telling me how excited they were that I was there. They were big Kiss fans and they often did *Firehouse* in their sets – you can go on YouTube and pick it up – and they were excited because there was a yoghurt manufacturer that was going to invest in them. I begged them and said, "Don't do it! I'll finance your demo and fly you to New York." And I did.

I bought David his first pair of platform heels and some leather pants. I put them up in a hotel, got them in Electric Lady studios and got in Dave Whitman, who engineered some of our records and worked on Humble Pie and lots of other stuff. And we recorded about 15 songs and it's still never been released.

I took the tape to our then manager, Bill Aucoin, and I let Paul hear it and the guys in the band. Everybody shrugged their shoulders and went, "So what?" And I'm going, "You're killing me! Whaddya mean, so what? Listen to that!" But everybody was too busy with their life. So I got Van Halen to do a showcase for Bill but he still didn't get it. He thought they were like Black Oak Arkansas, because Black Oak had a guy with long blonde hair [Jim Dandy] and all that.

So even though they were signed to my production company exclusively, Man Of A Thousand Faces Incorporated of course, Kiss were about to go out on tour with *Love Gun*. I said, "I'm tearing up your contract because I don't want to tie you down. I can't ethically, morally and in other ways keep you locked in if I can't work on you. I've got to go out on tour. I'll get off tour in six months, eight months. You're free to go get your own deal. If you don't get it in that time you can come back to me and we'll try it again." And within a month they were on Warner Bros and off into the studio. By the time we got off tour *You Really Got Me* was on the radio and it was a massive hit.

DONALD TRUMP

Well, Donald is a huge fan of Gene Simmons. Mostly he's jealous of my hair which is much cooler than his. Everybody thinks we both wear wigs, but no, we don't. They're all just jealous. I've known him off and on for a long time. Even though he comes from a good background and all that, he's a self-made man, I'd like to think that he thinks like me. He would like to think he's like me of course, but the bitch never will be and he knows it!

I like to kid with him because he comes off as this hard-headed guy because it's part of the game, but he's a pussycat. You've got to hand it to somebody like him. Like Richard Branson, who I know well too. Branson, Trump, self-made guys who continue to live by their own rules.

If you take a look at their business model, it defies logic. Branson will sit in a business meeting and when these guys toss due diligence numbers at him he says, "Look, just cut the shit. What is it? Don't give me 10 reams of information, just give me the sense of it." The big guys play the big games in simple ways, because at some point you have to say "go" or "stop" or "buy" or "sell". At some point you have to make that assessment. You can over-think things.

It's like being in the studio. It's never been proven that the longer you stay in a studio, the better your record is. Or the more money you spend…

ROBERT DE NIRO

It's just a hello, goodbye kind of relationship. But the interesting thing about De Niro for me is that he has a long and very public history of exclusively loving dark flesh. He loves black women. And so here's the Kiss connection: Eric Carr, our beloved drummer who unfortunately passed away to cancer in 1991, had a really sweet and pretty hot black girlfriend named Pantera, before the band of the same name. I mean, you could tell, with a name like that she was gonna be hot! It's not Magda, it's Pantera. She was hot stuff. De Niro met them both and wasted no time on zoning in on Pantera.

The connection there was that one of the biggest fans that we had was this guy called Fat Vinnie, who must have seen 200 or300 Kiss shows. He travels around the world, he's had triple-bypass heart operations, and all the way through the recovery process he has still seen every show. Now, De Niro was about to start filming *The King Of Comedy* which deals with an extreme fan of Jerry Lewis, and De Niro wanted to meet one and get to know one. So Eric's like, "Hey Bob, meet Fat Vinnie." De Niro actually lived at his house because he wanted to get see what an extreme fan was all about. He fashioned his idiosyncrasies and his style of talking for the entire film on a Kiss fan! In fact, there's a pivotal moment where De Niro said he wanted Fat Vinnie to come and work for him as his driver and personal assistant, and Vinnie said, "Sorry, I can't – Kiss is going back out on tour!"

SIMON COWELL

I like Simon! We understood each other right away. He's the only honest one on *American Idol*. I've known Randy Jackson for a long time too. Paula Abdul and I were going to do some projects together. I was a judge on *American Idol* for a few episodes three years ago. But the only one who tells the truth is Simon. Just because you're on television you're supposed to say nice things, but in the real world, if you get off stage and you suck, you suck! And tough love is good. But he's not nasty. Truth hurts.

There was this one guy who came on the show, a black guy with a gold, I think they call it a grill, where your entire teeth are covered by a piece of jewellery that you put on. You couldn't understand what he was saying. He was so extremely bad that it was fascinating. It's like Keith Richards' skin. When I met Keith I was fascinated by his hands and fingers. Now most people would say that's ugly, but it's not – it's fascinatingly beautiful in its ugliness. Have you held his hand? It's like leather on a sofa and you're fascinated by it.

I said to this kid on *American Idol*, "You don't belong here, but you're a fascinating guy. You should be in movies, because you look like a guy who could hold up a 7/11 [store] and be like that." And sure enough, he was arrested for holding up a 7/11 after the show. He's in jail as we speak.

THE PEOPLE

VS KISS

In 2009, the members of Kiss put themselves at the mercy of the ultimate interrogators – *Classic Rock* readers. This is what happened…

Interrogation: **Geoff Barton** Portraits: **Ross Halfin**

Kiss: bracing themselves for a barrage of questions about *The Elder*.

S*onic Boom* is a really great album and has shown the whole world how powerful the current Kiss line-up is. Is there a plan for a sequel? – *Mikaël From Paris*

Simmons: There is, I'm sure. [To Eric Singer:] Do you want to do another record?

Singer: I don't want to go on record and say: "Yeah, we're doing another album." But I don't think I've ever had an easier time making a record than with *Sonic Boom*. We were able to do it so naturally and effortlessly. Not that we didn't put any effort into it, but the fact that everybody was very focussed. There was never any pressure. To me, that's the way it's supposed to be. So… more new music to come from Kiss? Potentially.I think so. I don't see why not.

Simmons: It's a great position to be in, and we've been there a long time. When you have nothing to prove to anybody. It's like the feeling you had when you first picked up a guitar. You did it because you loved it. Even before the chicks. When you do it for the chicks and the money and the fame… that happens later. But when you first pick up a guitar, you turn up your amp, you're getting off on it and no one's watching you. That's the real moment you want to connect with.

Stanley: We had a great time recording *Sonic Boom*, so why stop? There have been times when making albums has been incredibly tedious and distasteful. A real chore. When you're dealing with people making demands of quotas of songs, outside writers coming in, interruptions, unreliability, et cetera. That's not a situation where you can be creative. With *Sonic Boom*, no one outside the band heard it until it was done. [Manager] Doc McGhee didn't even hear it. Just because I wasn't interested in anybody's opinion. So we had a great time making it and there's no reason why we can't do it again. That being said, if I couldn't produce it again, I doubt I'd be interested. It wouldn't make sense to take 10 steps forward and then go back and have chaos in the studio again.

***Classic Rock*:** So you don't rule out more new songs, more new stuff?

Stanley: If I had to bet, I'd say there'll be another Kiss album. Sooner rather than later.

Q: Will Bruce Kulick ever come back? He always wears a bandana now. He would be great with 'pirate' make-up. – *Conrad Dunn*

Simmons: Okay. I'll make a note of that.

Q: Why don't you play more stuff from the 80s and 90s? There are some great songs that would make perfect sense to play in big outdoor arenas this summer in Europe. – *Pontus Glimsand*

Stanley: I'm a great believer that songs are obscure because they deserve to be. I remember going to see The Rolling Stones at the Wiltern Theater in LA and it was billed as being a night when they would play all obscure songs. After about 20 minutes I thought: "For God's sake, cut it out." Obscure songs are songs that aren't as good as the well-known ones.

Thayer: The momentum and the energy of the set dictate what goes on. We've tried playing certain songs, in rehearsal and sometimes at live gigs, and you know what works – and what doesn't work – immediately. You know when there's a connection between the band and the fans. It's not a conspiracy to omit certain songs, it's gut feeling.

★★★★★★★★

"If you're in a band with Ace Frehley and Peter Criss, who became alcoholics and drug addicts… well, just cut the cancer out and move on." – Gene Simmons

Stanley: Someone once asked me: "Why don't you play *Just A Boy* from [Kiss's notorious 1981 album] *Music From The Elder?*" Well, I'll tell you why. Because the amount of people who bought that album wouldn't fill a shoebox. To make one or two people happy by playing *Just A Boy* means we're going to have 15,000 people scratching their heads.
Simmons: When we come to England the plan is to do *Crazy Nights*, which we haven't played for ever.
Singer: And *God Gave Rock'N'Roll To You*.
Simmons: We have certain songs that the fans demand to hear, even though you think you're sick and tired of hearing them yourself. And our dilemma is, after 200 songs or whatever the amount of original material is, how do you put a set together? What 20 songs do you put out?
Singer: The majority rules, and the majority of people who come to a Kiss show aren't necessarily the total diehard fans. The majority of the crowd just wants to hear the big songs, the hits.
Classic Rock: Paul, it's strange you should mention *The Elder*, because we've got a question about it.
Stanley: Oh my God.

Q: In *The Elder*, just how does The Boy defeat Mr Blackwell other than believing in himself? I need specifics! – *Phoenix Phil*
Stanley: So do I.

Q: Tommy, do you ever glance across the stage and think: "Fk me, I'm in Kiss!"?** – *Fraser Munro*
Thayer: I think that every day. To be the lead guitar player in one of the biggest bands ever… that's not too bad.
Stanley: Don't you sometimes say: "Fuck YOU, I'm in Kiss!"?
Thayer: Well, yeah. It's top of the game, y'know.

Q: Gene, you've always said that you don't drink alcohol, and in fact you don't like alcohol. So how come you always sing *Cold Gin*? – *Tim Ford*
Simmons: Ace wrote it. And it was written in a different time. But I've also played murderers in movies. So far I haven't killed anybody.
Classic Rock: How far have Kiss moved on since the Ace and Peter days?
Simmons: Make no mistake about it, teamwork is important. Who you surround yourself with will either help you go up the ladder or drag you straight to the pits of hell. You will be judged by the company you keep. And in plain English that means if you're in a band with Ace Frehley and Peter Criss, who you love dearly as brothers but who became alcoholics and drug addicts and so on… well, just cut the cancer out and move on.

Q: Paul, have you ever slept with a man? – *Grant Roffey*
Stanley: That question used to come up in the early days of Kiss, because when we started out my Starchild persona was supposed to be bisexual. Now, I fully admit that some of my antics on stage might be attractive to males as well as females. The bare chest and everything. But what can I say? I'm happily married. In fact, I've been married twice. I've got one child from my first marriage (Evan) and two (Colin and Sarah) from my second. End of story, as far as I'm concerned.

Eric Singer: the Catman cometh.

Q: Have you heard Ace Frehley's new record, *Anomaly*, and what do you think of it? – *Cherry Bombed*
Stanley: I can't say I've heard the entire thing. And I've no wish to get into a pissing match. If Ace is happy with it – and he clearly is – then that's good enough. Obviously anything I say is going to be dissected under a microscope. So what I think of the album is immaterial and can only lead to people stirring things up. So I'm happy he made it, and I'm happy he's pleased with the result.
Thayer: I've heard bits and pieces. I haven't heard the whole thing, but what I heard sounded good. Ace is Ace and it sounded very much like Ace, and there's a lot of people who like that.

Q: Is Doc McGhee still your manager, as I heard he is managing Guns N' Roses? – *Andy Troderman*
Stanley: That's been very funny. A few weeks ago I said to Doc: "It would've been be nice if you'd told us." Doc replied: "I had nothing to do with it." Axl has decided, from what I understand, that Doc is his manager. That's a one-way agreement, because Doc is not managing Guns N' Roses. One day he certainly might but he's not right now. And he definitely is still our manager.

Q: Gene, would you let your daughter sleep with a similar number of men as you have women? – *Jon*
Simmons: It's a double standard, but the answer's no. It's something that men want and desire, and women, perhaps, don't. But once Sophie grows up she's going to be making her own decisions. Some of them I'll like, some of them I won't.

Q: Have you ever planned or wanted to do a stage effect/stunt that's just been too unrealistic or impossible to pull off? – *T.V.*
Stanley: I once had this idea to attack my amp with a guitar – and the amp would bleed [laughter] and groan [more laughter]. You'd hear it through the sound system. You'd hack it up and blood would come pouring out. That was an idea that didn't see the light of day.
Thayer: One time I thought it'd be cool to have lasers shooting from the guitar. We talked about it, actually, to some special effects people. But as it turned out there are certain laws where you have to be very careful about where lasers go, because they might blind someone. So it was decided for safety reasons it couldn't be done. But we're definitely going to have some new tricks up our sleeves in the future.

"I stand by my comments about Michael Jackson. What the fuck is any child doing in a grown man's bed? The evidence is damning." – Gene Simmons

Q: Other than the *Kiss Alive!* albums, what is the greatest live rock album ever released? – *Carl Mason*
Thayer: Boy, that's a really tough one.

Stanley: It *is* tough. I'd say The Who *Live At Leeds*.
Thayer: I was just thinking the same thing. I've had that album since I was a kid. It's raw, it's balls, it's great, it's for real. And Townshend's one of my favourite all-time guitar players too.
Stanley: It's a real live album. You can hear the amps buzzing. An impressive album. Humble Pie's *Rockin' The Fillmore* is also brilliant, but there's something about *Live At Leeds* that epitomises what a live album can be. It's the real deal.

Q: Why didn't you create new characters instead of putting Tommy and Eric in Ace and Peter's old make-up? – *Alastair Hastie*
Simmons: We've been there, done that. We've worn make-up; we haven't worn make-up. We tried The Fox and The Wizard, The Ankh, and then we decided to go back to basics. If you are worthy of wearing the crown, the uniform, then you should. And if you're not worthy of wearing it, you shouldn't. We tried new personas and then went back to the classic ones. As simple as that.
***Classic Rock*:** Eric, would you have rather been a new Kiss character? A squirrel or something?
Singer: I don't get emotional about it. I look at it like it's putting on a uniform and there's a job to do. I've never taken an emotional stance on the thing. I'm a big basketball fan. Take The Lakers as an example. They have a uniform they wear; it's purple and gold. The team has evolved throughout the years, but it's always The Lakers. They have the standard of being the most successful basketball team, and they have the legacy of that uniform. To me, that's how you have to look at Kiss. It's a big job. There's a standard to bear.

Q: Tommy, what was your experience when you first put the make-up on? – *Allesandro from Rome, Italy*
Thayer; I had a little more experience [than Eric Singer] because when I was a young kid, back when I was four years old, my father took me to a Kiss concert. I put on Kiss make-up like all the other kids. So I'd messed around with it a little bit before.
***Classic Rock*:** Were you always Ace?
Thayer: Yeah, because I was a guitar player. And at one point, for fun, me and some friends formed Cold Gin, which was kind of a Kiss tribute band. It wasn't serious; we didn't do it for a living or anything. We did it for laughs for a little while because we were all big fans. So I got a little head start on the make-up thing. A lot of people don't realise we put our own make-up on; they think we have people to do it for us. Like anything, when you do dozens of shows, hundreds of shows, you really get pretty good at it.
***Classic Rock*:** Eric, what did it feel like when you first put on the Kitty Kat make-up?
Singer: Well, the first time Paul put it on for me. I had never done it before. It's a procedure and you have to learn how to do it. The only time I remember it feeling unusual was the first show I ever did, which was in Japan in 2001, and that was with Ace, Gene and Paul – three of the original guys. We hadn't done any pre-production, so I'd never played drums with the make-up and costume on. For some reason we weren't able to do that. So for this first show, I remember playing and I felt this weird out-of-body surreal experience. Because I saw Kiss when they started on their first tours, so for me to be up there playing drums… I do remember distinctly it feeling odd. In a good way, though. But, like I said, it's a non-issue. To me, what Kiss does is entertainment. It's a show and… the show must go on.

Tommy Thayer: filling the space vacated by Ace.

Q: Have you ever worn your full on-stage get-up backstage, when 'entertaining groupies', and have you ever thought of expanding the Kiss brand into a tasteful pornography range? – *Agent Robbo*
Stanley: Those are interesting questions. In the early days I do remember playing the Tampa Pop Festival and as we're walking off stage the promoter of the show seemed to single me out. He said: "Come over here with me." And I walk with him to one of the trailers. I'm thinking: "I'm going to have to say: 'No thanks, I don't do drugs.'" The promoter opens the door… and it's a travelling whorehouse. He's brought in all these women. I was rather relieved, you know. I had my make-up on, my boots, and the work was done. It was really interesting to walk in there from the stage, from being in front of 30,000 people to the intimacy of a room full of hookers.
Thayer: On my first tour with Kiss I definitely did the deed in the get-up. Proud of it. I also have to say that I've also done it the other way round.
***Classic Rock*:** What do you mean, a reversal of roles? You had sex with Ace?!
Thayer: Yeah, when the chicks were in make-up and I wasn't.
Stanley: I also remember a letter in *Playboy* from a woman who made her husband wear my make-up.
***Classic Rock*:** What about the other question – expanding the Kiss brand into a tasteful pornography range?
Stanley: Um, is there such a thing as a tasteful pornography range? I don't know. That seems more up Gene's alley. He can rationalise anything as tasteful.

Q: Gene, was it you who paid a million dollars for *Batman* No.1? – *Hazza*
Simmons: I did not, but it was a good price.
***Classic Rock*:** Would you pay a million dollars for a comic book?
Simmons: As an investment, yes. The value of pop culture goes up every year, far more than real estate, and it's far less volatile. In the art world paintings can go for $30, $40, $50 million. For Simmons Comics, which is my company, I own every single piece of original art we've ever published. I make the deals. I have all the pages downstairs in my house in a vault.

Who should be first in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame? Kiss or Alice Cooper? – *Dannorama*
Stanley: I don't really think it matters. Because the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, quite honestly, is the emperor's new clothes. It's convincing people that's

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"It was very interesting to go from being on stage in front of 30,000 people to the intimacy of a room full of hookers." – Paul Stanley

Paul Stanley: "The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame means nothing."

something is there that isn't. It's smoke and mirrors. The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame sounds very official but in fact it's just a few people who have registered a name and decided who's in and who's out. So whoever gets in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame… who cares? If we get in we would accept, gladly, because we have fans to whom it means a lot. For that reason we would do it. But to give the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame so much credibility is only based on the name sounding like it means something. And it means nothing.
Simmons: I think Alice should be first. Because when Alice came along it was a game-changer. We must give him his due. He may not mean as much now but at the time he was The Man. So riveting that Raquel Welch tried for years to fuck him and he wouldn't do it.

Q: Gene, do you stand by your comments [*Classic Rock* issue 142] that Michael Jackson was a child molester? You said you knew a member of his touring band who quit because of seeing boys coming out of the hotel rooms. However, Jennifer Batten, Jacko's former tour guitarist, recently went on record to deny your claims. – *Pickled Pete*
Simmons: Naturally, I stand by my comments. It was [off the record, Simmons tells us the name] who left the Jackson tour. But that's nothing. Just ask the children. Would you ever give anybody $22 million to withdraw their lawsuit? Would you ever give anyone $3.5 million? Well, Jackson did on both occasions. We don't know the details of the other settlements. There were some notable celebrities who didn't attend his memorial service. Diana [Ross] didn't go and neither did Oprah. Oprah Winfrey's comment, when she was asked about Michael, was: "Anyone who's had so many allegations against him… that gives one pause for thought." What the fuck is any child doing sleeping in a grown man's bed? The evidence is damning.

Q: Can you perhaps lower meet and greet prices or come outside to see your fans? – *Nat Erickson*
Stanley: No. There's no reason to lower the price because it is a special event for people who can afford it. Do we come out and say hello to our fans? No. We bust our ass on stage for two-and-a-half hours, saying hello to our fans. It's not feasible, not for a band like us who kill ourselves on stage and then get a well-deserved rest.

Q: Eric, who is your biggest influence as a drummer? – *Mark*
Singer: I'd probably say Buddy Rich. Even though I don't play that style and I don't try to emulate him. But I remember my father taking me to see him play live – and I was awestruck. I had a good view, I was at the seat from the side, so I could really see what he was doing with his hands and feet, and how he played. The guy was a prodigy. He didn't read music. He was one of those freaks who could just walk on stage and play brilliantly.

Q: Do you genuinely support the claim that nobody in Kiss is irreplaceable? If so, is there a time-frame on Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons' retirement? – *Beta Ray Bill*
Stanley: Plans do go awry. Farewell tours go

Gene Simmons: $1 million for a comic book is "a good price".

awry. You believe that something is the right thing to do when you're doing it, then you may realise you were wrong. So to plan three years from this month and say I'm going to call it quits… all I can say is that when the time comes it'll be the right time. I can't say when it will be, but I'm 100 per cent confident that there is more than one person out there who could do what I do just as well, if not better, and bring something to the band that I can't.

***Classic Rock*:** Perhaps Evan Stanley and Nick Simmons could take over Paul and Gene's roles and thus continue the Kiss lineage?

Stanley: I wouldn't wish that on either one of them. Who needs to be Frank Sinatra junior? That's not fun.

Q: If Kiss were to come out today, would they have the same success? – *Lakota Bluetm*

Stanley: I don't know. You'd have to find out a way to negate, or erase, all that we've done that impacted on the bands that are around today.

Thayer: Including some bands that are already in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame.

Stanley: That question is so hypothetical, because Kiss influenced a lot of what is out there today. The current music scene clearly is based, in part, on what Kiss has done. We're living in a time where it's much harder for bands to have individuality. As soon as something starts to break ground there's a copy of it halfway around the world. It's almost like the world's too small. It becomes homogenous. When we started out, we were the only Kiss and I think at that point there were much fewer bands, but they were all much more individual.

Q: Gene, you were caught 'in the act' on the so-called Sex Tapes Video. For someone who's slept with so many women, you didn't seem to be the Casanova we've been led to believe. – *Irving Fredrick*

Simmons: Okay. All right then. What's the question?

***Classic Rock*:** Probably… why didn't we see the Casanova-style Gene that we expected?

Singer: Put it this way. I'm not speaking just for Gene, I'm speaking in general terms. Sometimes when you least expect it, when you engage in activities, depending on the dynamic involved with the two people, sometimes you're inspired to greater heights and you go to greater lengths to do…

Simmons: Ha-ha-ha-ha!

Singer: …To do, er, extracurricular activities and really engage yourself into the whole thing. Other times it's wham, bam, thank you ma'am. Like David Bowie said. So sometimes it's about being very selfish and self-serving and just gratifying yourself. Thinking, 'I just want to get my nuts off'.

Simmons: You know, I didn't say any of that.

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"Back when I was four years old, my father took me to a Kiss concert. I put on Kiss make-up like all the other kids." – Tommy Thayer

SOME KIND OF MONSTER

In 2012, **Kiss**' new album, *Monster*, saw them back to their kick-ass best.

Words: **Philip Wilding**
Portraits: **Ross Halfin**

Kiss alive: the band's stage show is still one of the most spectacular in rock.

For their 20th studio album, Kiss spent a lot of time sitting around talking before they even considered picking up their instruments. Gene Simmons would drive the winding mile or so of road from his house up to Paul Stanley's grand Beverly Hills home, where the rest of his band would be sitting around among the guitars and flight cases littering Paul's home studio.

During the first day of being back there together, they reached a consensus: "Only band songs," says Gene, sitting backstage at the Alpine Valley Music Theatre that nestles among the Wisconsin mountains. On the other side of the band's enclosure are Kiss's co-headliners on the tour, Mötley Crüe. In the distance, The Treatment can be heard warming up the audience, while the sun is still going down over the distant mountain peaks.

"Band songs written together in a room," he continues, "eyeball to eyeball, throwing ideas back and forth. It's hard to duck criticism when someone's staring right at you. In the past, we would all go off and write and demo up tracks. I would come in with 30 or 40 songs but, in all honesty, they were all over the place. This time the ideas came fast and furious – we were energised. We were down in Hollywood at Conway Studios when Eric [Singer] started talking about the fury of The MC5, about an approach and a vibe he liked. Right then and there, we started to throw around chord patterns and we wrote and recorded the basic track of *Back To The Stone Age* the same day."

It was PT Barnum who said, "Every crowd has a silver lining," and Simmons's equally hucksterish approach to his audience makes it hard to see when he really believes in something. He'll enthuse about Hello Kitty Kiss toilet paper with the same zeal he uses to sell you Kiss's latest golf course in Las Vegas – with Gene, there is no off switch. He believes in the brand he's selling, which sometimes makes it hard to detach the thing that made them great in the first place – the music – from the all-consuming Kiss machine.

"I wanted to be sure that everyone was committed 100 per cent to this album," says Paul Stanley, who produced the band's latest record, when *CR* asks what might make *Monster* so different to 2009's *Sonic Boom* (which showed plenty of promise) or the calamitous *Psycho Circus* (which showed none). "No one was allowed to be working on other projects and letting someone else do the work for them and then putting their name on a song or phoning in their parts. To everybody's credit, they not only signed up but did all of the work too. I see a lot of bands who've been around a while go into the studio and try to make the album they once made, but this time I wanted us to make the album we've never made."

Like Simmons, Stanley is not above grandstanding when it comes to talking up all things Kiss, but the band's decision to let themselves be inspired by the acts they grew up listening to in order to springboard *Monster* has paid off handsomely. For Tommy Thayer, it was Aerosmith and Deep Purple; Eric Singer regressed to Steve Marriott and early Rod Stewart; while Stanley and Simmons revelled in the British Invasion that swamped the Eastern Seaboard in the 60s – The Who, Humble Pie, Clapton and the Rolling Stones.

And for all their talk (Stanley: "I truly believe it's far beyond a Kiss album. It's a great album, with all the classic elements of the bands I listened to." Simmons: "Right now, musically, we are mighty"), *Monster* actually makes good on their promises.

Familiarly egocentric (*Freak*, *The Devil Is Me*, *Eat Your Heart Out*), as well as occasionally ludicrous (*Take Me Down Below* – lyrically, it's as blunt as a hammer or teenage foreplay), it's easily the best record Kiss have made in decades. Full of fire and verve, it's immediate but has an enduring appeal. *Sonic Boom* showed flashes of what Kiss in make-up Mark II might do, but *Monster*'s brought out the best in them.

"It was hard once the original line-up wasn't on the same page any more," says Stanley. "Once we'd lost that group point of view and we started changing members, it really became something that was transitional. We were trying to find not only stability, but also a level of focus and musicianship, even camaraderie, and a common point of view. That really hasn't been there until this line-up."

"Ideas come easily when you feel you're in a real band," agrees Simmons, "when you have a real team. Whether you're in a football team, a commando team, you are only as strong as your teammates – you're only as good as those people around you."

Batman returns: "Is this the last Kiss album? Not a chance."

As a band, this latest version of Kiss have 10 years under their diamante belts. Nothing if not traditionalists, Tommy Thayer still fires rockets from his guitar each night, and Eric Singer still sits atop a drum platform that ascends to take him out of sight as it once did Peter Criss. It's on record where they're making a real difference. In the best Kiss tradition, both take lead vocals on the new album, Tommy on *Outta This World* while Singer romps through the Stanley-penned *All For The Love Of Rock & Roll*.

"There was synchronicity on this record, more so than the last one, mainly because this line-up of Kiss has been together for so long," says Singer. "Plus we'd done *Sonic Boom* and we know how to do it together and everyone has the confidence and experience of making a record as a band to go, 'Okay, I know what we can do and push on up to the next level.' And I think that's what we did."

Not least Tommy Thayer, who chalked up 10 co-writing credits out of the final dozen songs on *Monster*. However, he's quick to praise Paul Stanley, producer. "I'll take a little bit of credit for the great rock'n'roll songs," he says, "but Paul did such a great job of too. He got the right set of songs and made us dig deep on the album. When you're writing, you're going everywhere stylistically and Paul's really good at deciphering the material – and you need a lot of discipline to do that."

Stanley, too, kept *Monster* sounding vital by limiting the band to a handful of takes in the studio. Most songs on the final record are first or second takes, Stanley insisting that spontaneity and feel won out over the need for making everything sound absolutely perfect every time. It's an approach he feels began with *Sonic Boom*.

When it's all said and done, if you took away the make-up and the bombs and the toys and games… it's always about music, always will be.

Gene Simmons

"I think *Sonic Boom* was a great starting point for this line-up," he says. "If we were going to do an album after *Sonic Boom*, it had to be better – and I knew we *could* do something better. It was just a matter of putting in the time and effort… I just wanted to get the best out of the band, which was so great at this point and so much the essence of everything I ever wanted it to be. Plus there's certainly no substitute for guys who really enjoy each other's company and like playing together.

"Some people thought we'd have an album cover with one of those paintings, those superhero illustrations we have on some of the earlier records, and I didn't want that because the band is flesh and blood. Kiss has been around 40 years; the band is made up of four individuals. We wear warpaint and outfits and that's all well and good, but we're not fantasy figures or cartoon characters, so I wanted a portrait on the cover, something that said that we are real – we're a rock'n'roll band."

And while Stanley sat patiently behind the glass coaxing the best performances from his band, even the God Of Thunder put aside the vagaries of business to reinvest in the band's musical legend. "Business is fine," Gene says. "I'll tell you what, I had read horror stories in the music trade magazines of famous bands who had lost fortunes, though they were world-famous – The Beatles and Allen Klein, the Stones, too – and I was going to make sure that would never happen to me and the band. Never. And that meant being educated about structure and about business. I care, and you know what happens when you're not informed and educated? Vultures and sharks take advantage. But not with us. We'd sue God himself if he dared transgress.

"But when it's all said and done, and if you took away the make-up and the bombs and the toys and games… When Smashing Pumpkins go out on tour today, they begin and end their shows with *Black Diamond*. Metallica have played *Detroit Rock City*, so it's always about music, always will be. I hear rumours that this is the last Kiss album and I can tell you, not a chance. If we were not on this long, worldwide tour, we would be in the studio writing and recording a new record."

Even those close to the band have been surprised by what Thayer, Singer, Simmons and Stanley have managed to achieve with their latest album. "It's funny because people hear it and go, 'My god, imagine if this was this band's first album, it would be remarkable,'" says Stanley with a chuckle. "But the funny thing is, it couldn't be a band's first album – we had to go through everything that we went to, to get to this point.

"But I can tell you, with my hand on a Bible, this is the band as it always should have been – this is truly Kiss. This is it – everything feels like it was always leading up to this point."

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Paul Stanley: "We couldn't let *Psycho Circus* be the last album."

Q&A

PAUL STANLEY

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2012

Having taken the reins for Kiss's 2012 album, Monster, the Starchild reckoned it could be their best ever.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Portrait: **Kevin Estrada**

"We couldn't let *Psycho Circus* be the last album. That was a disaster," says Paul Stanley, seated on the Kiss tour bus as it heads towards the next show on The Tour with Mötley Crüe and The Treatment.

As with that album's follow-up, 2009's *Sonic Boom*, when it came to recording Kiss's 20th studio album, *Monster*, Stanley was producing. He vetoed old demos, outside writers and choirs from the off. "I wanted to be sure that everyone was 100 per cent committed to this album. And, ultimately, I couldn't have been happier," he says.

How difficult is it producing Gene Simmons?
I have to give him credit because he very much toed the line and did his job and did it willingly and without any real resistance. I also made it clear that having songs on the album is not a birthright or something you had right to because of tenure in the band, they had to be great songs. And I included Gene in that.

The fact that Gene is a musician first sometimes gets overlooked.
It's understandable, because he tends to do so many things that, in some people's minds, detract or distract from the fact that he's terrific on the bass.

The *Monster* album sounds a million miles away from *Psycho Circus*.
I knew *Monster* could be a great album. The point of doing *Sonic Boom* was to not let *Psycho Circus* be the last album, because that was such a debacle. The last thing I wanted is to have something that was such a shambles be the last Kiss album. So *Sonic Boom* was a way to make amends. And once we decided to do *Monster*, I knew that building on what we did with *Sonic Boom* we could really turn it into something really special. I stand by this album. I think it's right up with the best of whatever we've ever done. In some ways it's the best.

> ***The band couldn't be here today if it hadn't been for Ace and Peter, and I would also say that the band couldn't be here today with Ace and Peter.***
>
> **Paul Stanley**

Why was *Psycho Circus* such a shambles?
Without poking dead bodies, the fact is the reunion tour started with the best of intentions, and as it progressed the situation regressed and deteriorated. By the time we went into the studio with the idea of doing a new album, all the old problems has reared their ugly heads and we found ourselves in the studio, basically the two of us, Gene and myself, and a bunch of lawyers talking on the phone. At this point I was wishing those lawyers could have played drums and lead guitar. It was a valiant attempt to make an album in the worst possible situation.

Kiss played a relatively stripped-back show when they played the Forum in London on Independence Day. Is it important to ditch the big production sometimes?
Absolutely. I've always gone for the point of view that a crap band with a big show is still a crap band. And when you strip everything away, I think it's when you see how powerful this band really is. My roots are in going to see the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Humble Pie, Slade, all those bands I saw around '68. I saw the Yardbirds with Jimmy Page playing. That's where I'm from, and I've always wanted to build a band on those kind of foundations, as opposed to just slapping on make-up and blowing a lot of shit up.

That's still fun, though.
It's terrific, but it's never a substitute for being a great band. That's why every once in a while I love to play a theatre or a club, just because the power of the band ultimately is the band.

***Destroyer* has just been reissued. What did you learn from making that album?**
One of the things that I've always carried with me after working with [album producer] Bob Ezrin is his sense of vision overall. Bob always talked about making a cohesive album, and when I'm working in the studio I certainly think back to that. *Destroyer* is a perfect example of a well-crafted album where everything feels like it belongs on there, and that's very much what I wanted with *Monster*.

Did you think you'd ever find a Kiss line-up that felt this right after the original one fell apart?
Contrary to what many people believe, the original line-up wasn't four equals giving the same amount of input. In some ways it was our own fault, and something that came back to bite us in the ass. The idea that we put out was that the four of us were equal contributors to the band. And it just wasn't true. We were trying to put forward that great image of something like the early Beatles – they lived together, they run down the street together – but it wasn't true. Unfortunately some of the guys actually bought into it.

But it must have worked for a while?
Certainly. When the band started there was a chemistry and combustibility and an 'all for one and one for all' attitude that soon disintegrated. But we pushed forwards with that image. And, honestly, when that was long gone we were still trying to soldier on. When we couldn't do it any longer we dissolved that line-up. When we got back together for the reunion, we really hoped – I did, certainly – that everyone had learnt from their mistakes, and perhaps we could look each other in the eye and make amends and move forward. And that's what it appeared to be, but it didn't continue. So I'm the first one to say that the band couldn't be here today if it hadn't been for Ace and Peter, and I would also say that the band couldn't be here today *with* Ace and Peter.

You pass time on the road playing music trivia quizzes with Gene and your sound man. Who usually wins?
Oh, I always win. Make no mistake about that.

What would Gene say if I asked him that?
If you ask Gene, he'll tell you he invented water. And that he owns it too.

Q&A

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2012

GENE SIMMONS

He may be richer and mouthier than most, but in 2012 'The Demon' was still trying to do the right thing. Honest.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Portrait: **Kevin Estrada**

For a man renowned for his verbose tirades, Gene Simmons is softly spoken for once. An extensive summer tour across America with Mötley Crüe and The Treatment has taken its toll on his vocal cords. Also, while that night's show at the Alpine Valley Music Theatre, Wisconsin might be followed by a few days off for the rest of the band, after the show Gene is flying back down to California to sing the US national anthem at the Oakland Raiders stadium for their opening game of the season. "So I have to save my voice," he says by way of an apology. But while his register might be lower, he's still resolutely and familiarly outspoken on all things Kiss and the band's latest album, *Monster*.

On the current tour you've got young British band The Treatment opening for you and Mötley Crüe. How are they holding up?
We've always taken great pride in giving new bands a chance. When we first started, English bands gave us our chance: Savoy Brown, Manfred Mann and Argent. You have to give back. And the list of bands we have given their first tours to is quite remarkable, actually: AC/DC, Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe, the first time around, Maiden, Rush – the list is too long to mention. And The Treatment, though still in its infancy, struck us as having the melodic and lyrical integrity of a real rock band. They're committed to giving it their all. And that was a reminder to us when we were starting out, that this is an opportunity few people on earth ever get.

> **We made $75 dollars a week when we started recording our first album. We didn't care, we were living our dream.**
> Gene Simmons

Kiss sound renewed with the new album, *Monster*. You said that Tommy and Eric have "revitalised Kiss with their work ethic".
Sometimes it takes new people in your life to make you realise what you've got. Often we take it all for granted. Paul and I have been through the wars. Members who succumbed to the pathetic clichés – drugs and alcohol – and all the misery it caused within the band and the damage done in front of the fans, decade after decade, tended to wear our nerves down. To have four members who can write and sing and perform as one is something we all talk about, because it reads well in interviews. But with Tommy and Eric it's a real, living and breathing animal.

Paul produced this record. Is it easy to take orders from him?
Of course. Who else would I trust? The strength of Paul at the helm is that he was willing to focus everything during that time frame. Even if the band wanted me involved in production, I can no longer stay trapped in a studio for three months. And I don't have the focus.

Were you always confident that you could one day replace Ace and Peter so comfortably?
Yes. Survival is a strong motivator. I used to be a lifeguard, and in training you're taught that if someone is drowning, swim out there and save them. If they are drunk or high and they wrap their arms around your throat in panic, you are to punch them in the face to prevent them from drowning you both. And if it looks like they're too far gone, you are to do whatyou can to survive so that you can live to save someone else on another day.

As part of the Hiring Our Heroes programme in the US, you've had an army vet, Paul Jordan, working with you on this tour. Is he pulling his weight?
This is not a PR hustle, this is real. And Jordan is a real hero. He has been in the US Army for 20 years; deployed [voluntarily] three times, been shot at and came home to no jobs. It's the least we can do. He's doing great. And a source of pride for me is he's got my ugly face tattooed on his chest.

***Destroyer: Resurrected*, has just been released. Is it fair to say that the *Destroyer* album changed your life?**
Destroyer was the first album that taught us success wasn't everything, and that the studio was a different place to the concert stage. Bob Ezrin taught us that we could be Kiss *and* have arrangement and drama in our music. *Destroyer* was also the first time we used outside musicians. Simply because a member didn't have the time to show up in the studio: "I have a card game." I'll never forget that. Pathetic.

What were you like in 1976? Insatiable?
Yes. I was a nobody but I always dreamed big. I still do. But before Kiss, I dreamed but didn't know how to make my dreams real. Kiss was the magical winged horse that took me to the top of Mount Olympus. And yes, to some we were and are gods. By 1976 I was bedding anything that moved. Before the band, I had a girlfriend or two. But when the band hit, I had a tsunami of girls I could wake up to and never bother to learn their names. I saw fans tattooing their bodies with our faces, way before this became the thing to do, and naming their kids after our song titles.

It still goes on. Yesterday we played in East Troy, in the middle of America. It was raining cats and dogs. And in front of me was a young man of about seven years old, with his father – a real Kiss fan. He introduced his son to me: "Deuce, meet Gene Simmons." I will always remember that.

After the band were broke for so many years, can you remember when Kiss first made real money?
We made $75 dollars a week when we started recording our first album. When we started touring we made $85 dollars a week. We didn't care, we were living our dream. We never thought of ourselves as being broke. And within a year-and-a-half of starting out we were playing Angel Stadium in Anaheim, California. It was all very heady stuff – pre-MTV and the internet and CDs or DVDs or cable TV, there was nothing for us to gauge how huge Kiss had become, without the aid of anything other than plain sweat, and playing every city we'd never heard of.

You've always talked a good game, but would it be fair to say that with *Monster* you've followed it up this time?
Yes. End of story.

Gene Simmons: "To some we were and are gods."

Tommy Thayer: "We wanted to make a big rock'n'roll record."

Q&A

TOMMY THAYER

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2012

He was ready to call it a day as far as being in a band. Then along came Kiss, who offered him the chance to be a Spaceman.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Portrait: **Kevin Estrada**

Tommy Thayer first stepped into Ace Frehley's hi-tops more than 10 years ago, after working behind the scenes in managerial and production roles with Kiss off and on since the mid-90s. He even had two co-songwriter credits with Gene Simmons on the band's 1989 album *Hot In The Shade*. For the latest album, *Monster*, he's upped his game considerably, with his name appearing as co-writer on 10 of the final 13 songs, and he takes lead vocals too on *Outta This World*. After an extended stint as the guitarist in Geffen Records band Black 'N Blue (who had albums produced by Gene Simmons) in the 80s, he says he'd all but given up on pursuing the dream of being in a band. And then came the offer to join Kiss.

After being in Kiss for the best part of 10 years, is it still intimidating taking your songs to Gene and Paul?

I'm very comfortable collaborating with those guys and bringing ideas and songs to the mix. I've been in the band so long now, so it's less of a concern for me. Also, out of respect for what I've done and what they do, I'm not the kind of guy who would just come in and start pushing my ideas on them. That's part of what makes it work so well. I understand that things take time and you have to go with the natural flow.

They're both big personalities too.

You're absolutely right. The personality thing is important and it's a big part of what makes this band work so well today. You've got four guys who respect each other. And as simple as that sounds, we're very fortunate. A lot of bands don't have that and they break up, and after you've met them you know why.

> *I remember Kiss coming out. To me it was the quintessential idea of what a band should be like in terms of image, songs, performance, theatrics.*
>
> **Tommy Thayer**

Did it take you a long time to inhabit the character of the Spaceman, or are you just playing a part?

You're part of Kiss and that's what I'm doing. I didn't invent the character, it's just a role I'm playing and this is what it is. That's the onstage persona. It's the make-up I wear, it's very simple. It's my version of that, it's not the same as the other guy, but it's where Kiss is in 2012.

Paul says *Monster* is a nod to the bands he grew up listening to. Do the 70s influences on the album come from you?

We're all rock'n'roll fans – we always have been and we always will be. The artists we grew up with come through in the songs that we write. That's definitely true for me too, though I came up in a slightly different era to those guys. But there's a lot of crossover and I love a lot of the same bands. But I have a slightly different perspective. I was 13 years old, listening to Deep Purple, Aerosmith, Kiss, Sabbath, those guys. I loved that stuff. Ronnie Montrose was on top of my list; Pat Travers, Robin Trower. So that's where I'm coming from.

Did *Monster* allow you a lot more freedom to be yourself?

It's the second album we've done as a band, that I've done as the lead guitarist of Kiss. *Sonic Boom* was more testing the waters, going in there with an idea of how we wanted to sound, but with this one we wanted to make a big rock'n'roll record. Which kind of opened the floodgates to just let it flow, instead of having a preconceived idea of what a Kiss record should sound like.

You were a big Kiss fan, weren't you?

Oh yeah, absolutely. I remember them coming out and I just loved them. To me it was the quintessential idea of what a band should be like in terms of image, songs, performance, theatrics. Everything about it was exactly what I loved, so I immediately became attracted to Kiss big-time. I loved it. It was one of my favourite bands.

You must have been elated when Black 'N Blue got to support Kiss in the US in the mid-80s.

Oh yeah. We'd released our second album, *Without Love*, and I got a phone call telling me that we were going on tour with Kiss as the opening act and I couldn't believe it. We did 20-something shows with Kiss in 1985 through North America and it was a fabulous experience. I'd met them before when I went to a show on the *Animalize* tour and did the pre-show thing, but I never got to know them until that tour. I connected a little more with Gene, truth be told, as he was a little more outgoing. And then we ended up hiring him as a producer for *Nasty Nasty*, and he eventually did *In Heat* too. So I became more of a friend of Gene's to begin with. I didn't really get to know Paul until later.

By the 90s you'd starting producing and writing for other bands. Is that where you were headed before you joined Kiss?

That's actually what I was thinking of doing at the time. I was trying to form another band, but I had some cool production deals with a couple of groups and I was trying to set up some record deals and I was enjoying being behind the scenes. There are only so many times you get to roll the dice with a band; you only get so many shots. I was thinking more about management and production, as that's where it was all going. I don't have to be in a band. And that was the strange thing at the time: I'd made up my mind that I wasn't going to pursue the band thing, I was going to go down the production/management side. Ironically, that's when Kiss, the biggest thing in my life, happened.

You did give it one last shot with the band Shake The Faith though. You even got celebrated writer Hunter S Thompson to provide the artwork for the *America The Violent* album.

I was with that band in the early 90s. We were tearing it up in the clubs in LA. Anyway, we recorded an album for a Japanese label. And we had seen some art that Hunter had done in *Playboy* magazine where he would actually take a photo and use his shotgun and then treat the photo; it was like this splatter effect, it was a really cool piece of art. And somehow – and I really don't remember how – I got hold of Hunter's phone number and I called him and asked him if he'd do something like that for us, sent him some music, and he called back and said he'd love to do it. It was as easy as that. And he just sent it over and it became our album cover. It's amazing when you look back at it now. Imagine the hoops you'd have to go through to get something like that done now.

Q&A

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2012

ERIC SINGER

In 2012, the man who replaced Peter Criss was still living the teenage dream of playing with his heroes.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Portrait: **Kevin Estrada**

The last time *Classic Rock* saw Kiss drummer Eric Singer, he had his head literally in the lighting rig at the band's Independence Day show at the Forum in north London. Cramming as much of their show as possible into a theatre-sized venue meant that Singer, atop his towering drum riser, was seated somewhere right of the lighting guy in the main truss. The drummer, who has played with Alice Cooper, Black Sabbath, Badlands, Brian May and Lita Ford, among others, laughs it off when we mention the cramped conditions and the stifling heat that night. "No pun intended, I'm always in the heat of the battle, as they say."

It was so hot at that show, the audience in the balcony could barely stay upright, yet you were thundering through songs like *Love Gun*.
It was pretty unbelievably hot at the Forum. But we'd just played some huge shows down in Texas, San Antonio, Albuquerque, did Mexico. The show in Phoenix was around 115 degrees, and on stage it had to be close to 130. I don't think I've ever played a hotter gig than that. So it's just part and parcel of being in Kiss.

You came to Kiss through playing drums in Paul Stanley's band, didn't you?
In 1989. And that was my introduction to Kiss World, if you will. I was aware of the band, and was a fan growing up. I met Paul and he asked me to play on that tour, and from that we developed a friendship. Paul asked me to help out with demos when he was working on songs – those guys would work independently of each other before they'd bring the songs in to the band – and so I helped out. Then eventually I played on *God Gave Rock And Roll To You* for *Bill & Ted* [the 1991 film *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*, starring Keanu Reeves], so that was my introduction.

> *I always pride myself more on being a really consistent, reliable background singer, and that, to me, was always what I brought to the table.*
> **Eric Singer**

The story goes that you never had to audition for the band.
I helped out and played on the *Revenge* record, so it was more like friend and studio drummer. And then when Eric Carr fell ill, that's when they were thinking that they had to get a drummer. I did audition, which a lot of people don't realise; they think I sort of slid in there. Even though I had done *Revenge*, they weren't sure what they were going to do. So they got together and had me play some Kiss songs, as Gene and Bruce Kulick had not played with me, other than on *Revenge*. So that was the tester.

When it came to recording *Monster*, part of Paul Stanley's proviso as a producer was not having outside songwriters involved, and not bringing old songs and demos to the table.
That's right. Some people have an old riff that they keep trying to rehash and will bring it out and see if they can rewrite it again. I know this from working with Tony Iommi years ago in Sabbath. Tony used to bring out all of his cassettes with all these old riffs. Some of them had Bill Ward or Vinnie Appice playing drums, and it was an old riff from a jam tape in rehearsal. And he thought maybe now's time to give it a fresh approach – maybe these guys will interpret it differently and we can use it. Paul said: "I don't want any old demos, Gene or anybody. Let's see what we all come up with now."

You took lead vocal on the track *All For The Love of Rock & Roll*.
I always pride myself more on being a really consistent, reliable background singer, and that, to me, was always what I brought to the table. And I think with Kiss it's that. But Kiss has always been about everybody being able to contribute and sing. I like all the great rock singers like Rod Stewart, Steve Marriott, Paul Rodgers… you know, blues-based with a little bit of rasp. So if I can sing a song that's more in that vein, which this is, then that suits my voice more and that's probably why this one came off the way it did, because it's something that feels more natural to me.

You first played live with Kiss in 1992.
That's right, at the Stone in San Francisco, just before the *Revenge* record came out. They wanted to go and do a promotional thing, get a little buzz and kind of warm it up. And I think maybe it was a way to break me in, I don't know. But we did a club tour of the US – 12 cities, 23 shows.

The people who saw Kiss on that tour said it was the loudest show they'd ever seen.
That's what I always remember. We did all these sweaty, small clubs, and we packed more PA in those shows than you'll probably ever see in the history of rock'n'roll. It was unbelievable how loud we were and how much PA system we had in those rooms.

You finally got to wear the Kiss make-up almost 10 years later.
Yeah, 2001. We were playing Japan. I had only put the make-up on once for a photo session prior to that. We didn't do any production rehearsals before that. Usually we do a full-on dress rehearsal where we get in costume and run through the whole show with lights and pyros, but we didn't do that – we didn't have the opportunity to. So when I got over there I was like a virgin. I popped my cherry for the first time in make-up in Japan.

What do you remember about it? Or was it all a blur?
The show started – and this was when Ace was still in the band, so it was Gene, Paul and Ace and myself – and we came down on the pod out of the light truss, and I looked up at them and went, "Wow, this is really weird, I'm playing on stage with Kiss. I'm actually in make-up and I'm the drummer, and there's Ace and Paul and Gene in front of me." Plus I was a fan of the band from their first album, I was very aware of Kiss right from the get go. I had that going on in my head. And then we hit it. Never looked back.

You're still a big fan of music, aren't you? Some musicians lose that.
I always tell people that I try to retain that teenage boy feeling for music. You need to keep a piece of that with you at all times – still be a fan and still appreciate music from the perspective of a listener and a fan, and not someone who becomes jaded, pessimistic and cynical.

Eric Singer: still very much a fan as well as a member of Kiss.

The Kiss branding gets stamped on everything. And we mean everything

"WE'RE ALL CAPITALIST PIGS AND THAT IS THE ESSENCE OF WHAT UNITES US. IT'S A HARSH TRUTH"

GENE DOESN'T MINCE HIS WORDS

KISS SCHOOL OF ROCK

FROM THE HAMMER ARCHIVE 2013

Who better to guide us through the chaos of the record industry than Gene Simmons: the man who made a killing?

It's a raw and painfully bright morning when Metal Hammer is summoned to meet the living legend that is Gene Simmons of Kiss to discuss the state of the music business in 2013.

On arriving at the venue we rush across the foyer and dive into a crowded lift just before the doors close, only to realise that the mighty tongued bassist is in there as well. It's a great chance to observe the man unawares up close, jammed into the tiny space with smartly dressed folk heading into various offices in the building. He stands out like a sore thumb, towering head and shoulders above everyone else, decked out in regulation Sunset Strip black cotton, denim and leather, with expensive wrap-around shades firmly in place, sipping a cup of coffee. When the doors slide shut he drawls loudly, "Don't touch my ass!" After a pause he nods at his manager: "I was talking about him." Then with perfect timing he rotates slowly to face a worried-looking clerk and deadpans: "You can touch my ass." When the doors open three floors above, everyone is laughing. The Demon's iconic stage gear and make-up are nowhere in sight, but Gene Simmons, it seems, is never "off".

A few minutes later in the interview room, the recorder has barely flickered into life and the question, 'What do you think of the music business today?' is still echoing round the room when he starts laying out his stall in a very matter-of-fact way – just in case there was any confusion about where he stands on the issue of free market economics.

"I like commerce. I like corporate entities and I think the more money you make, the better it is for society. Even if I went on stage as some hippie talking about peace and love, I'd still want to make as much money as possible. And because I make all of this money I spend it all and create jobs for people. If I don't make any money, then I don't create jobs and don't give to charities."

He is charming and funny to a fault, but espouses a message that lily-livered socialists and those that reject aggressive materialism will find hard to swallow. "I want to make as much money as possible and then make some more. My conviction is that everyone is just like me. And I think I can prove it to you.

"May I?" he asks politely, and waits for assent before continuing: "God appears to you and says, 'Regarding the money in your pocket, I'm going to give you two choices. Choice one: you can have less money in your pocket. Choice two: I can snap my Godlike fingers and you can have more money in your pocket. Which one will it be?'"

When we tentatively say that we'd like a little bit more money please, Gene barks: "You're a capitalist pig. And this is the essence of what unites us all. We all want more. There's no such thing as never enough. It's a harsh truth."

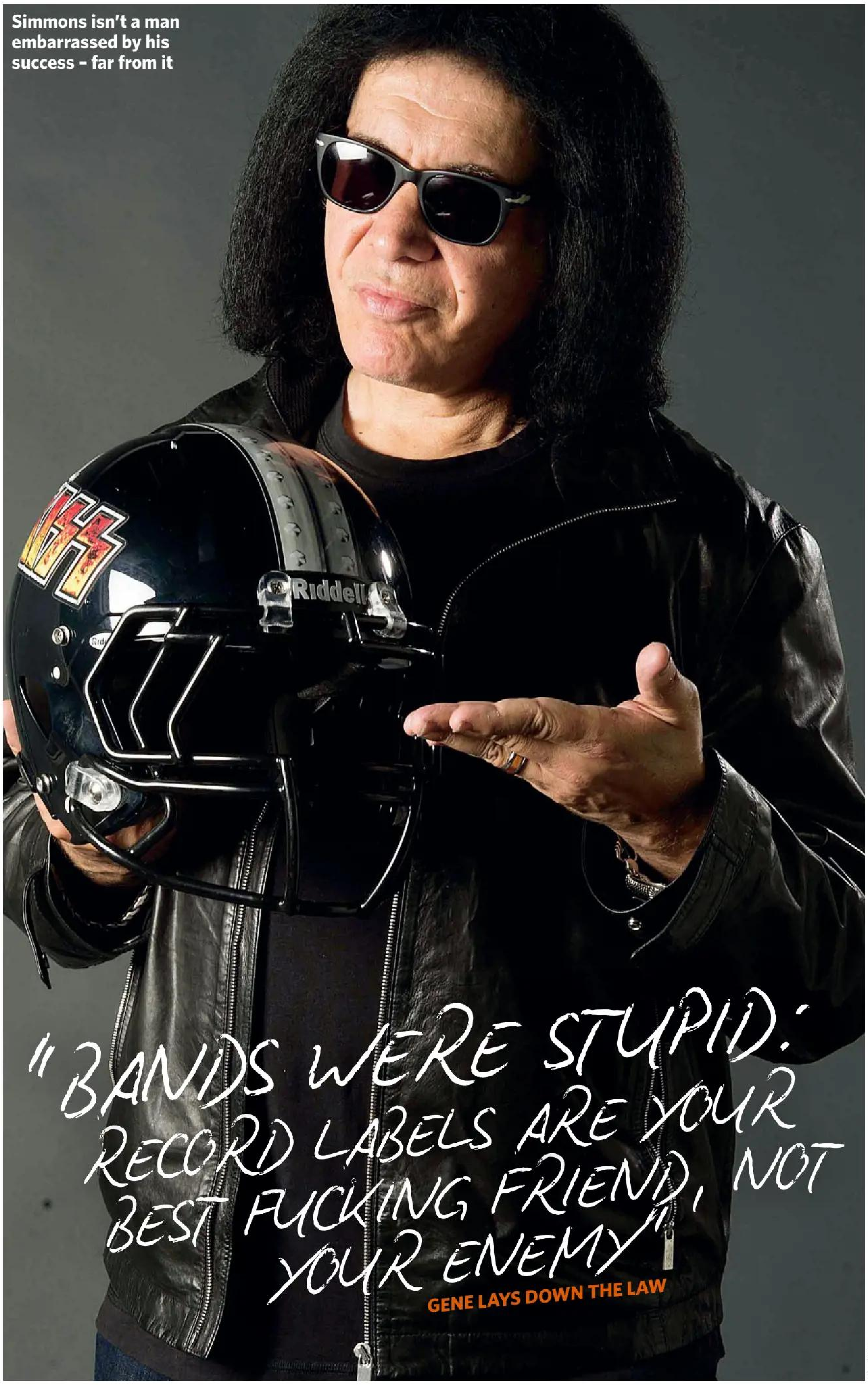
The greatest tongue in rock'n'roll?

MAIN: PRESS INSET: FUTURE

It was an upbringing constructed of harsh truths that shaped Gene Simmons. It's important not to slip into nasty, anti-Semitic innuendo when discussing the ultra-capitalist and ruthlessly effective business attitudes of this (or any) prominent Jewish entertainer, but he would probably be the first to admit that his unusual upbringing – for an elder statesmen of rock music at least – is key to understanding his psychology. And success.

Gene's mother and maternal uncle were the only members of a large family of Hungarian Jews to escape the death camps of the Nazi Holocaust by

Words: **John Doran**



Simmons isn't a man embarrassed by his success – far from it

PRESS X2

AMERICAN CAPITALIST

AUDACIOUS GENE MONEYMAKERS

KISS CONDOM

Gene has been doing his bit for contraception since the early 90s. One set of Kiss condoms came in 'Studded Paul', 'Tongue Lubricated' and 'Love Gun Protection' varieties. Obviously.

FAMILY JEWELS

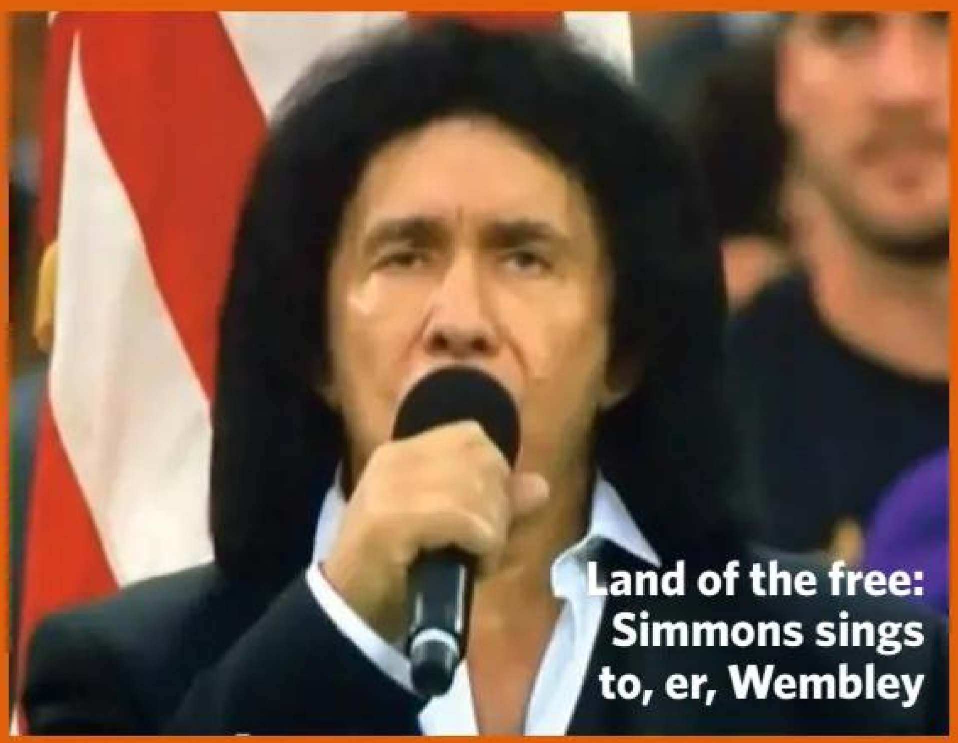
Having watched Ozzy Osbourne rake in fucktons of cash from a reality TV show, it was inevitable that Gene would follow suit. His show, starring the Simmons family, ran for seven successful seasons in the US. Ch'ching!

KISS BOOK

Subtlety is not the Kiss way. Their book, *Monster,* stands three feet tall, two-and-a-half feet wide and costs a perfectly reasonable $4,250. Limited to 1,000 copies worldwide, you really need to love Kiss to buy one.

NFL

Gene has become a somewhat unlikely but, we assume, well-paid ambassador for American Football overseas recently. He even sang the US national anthem at a game between Pittsburgh Stealers and Minnesota Vikings last September (despite being a rubbish singer).



Land of the free: Simmons sings to, er, Wembley

fleeing to Israel. This was where he was born and lived until the age of eight, "dirt poor" and raised on "a diet of milk and water". On arriving in Brooklyn in 1955 with no money and no English, the young lad faced an uphill battle of epic proportions. But he was one of the "huddled masses" seeking a new life beyond the Statue Of Liberty on Ellis Island in the Land Of Opportunity…

It was exactly his tragic family history which made him such a wholesale adopter of the American Dream, and helped place him where he is today ("At the summit of Mount Olympus" to use his own ostentatious words).

It is perhaps unsurprising that he has always been one of the music industry's fiercest critics of illegal downloading, and he claims he hasn't altered his stance one jot in the last 15 years. "I still think it's a crime. The sad part is that the fans are the ones who are killing the thing that they love: great music. For fuck's sake, you're not giving the next great band a chance."

He stands firmly in Metallica's corner for their decision to file a lawsuit against the file-sharing platform Napster in 2000. "It's their art. It's their creation. They should be allowed whatever legal recourse they have the right to. Record labels should have stood together and made the Great Wall Of China [around their product] and sued anybody who transgressed."

When we point out that if the major record labels had taken the deal that was originally on the table from Napster over a decade ago, artists would now be getting twice the amount of money that they are now from iTunes. He concedes this but, naturally, has his own take on what should have happened.

"They should have bitch-slapped them. Gone down with the FBI, seized everything and put everyone in jail. But then they should have done what the Allies did with the Nazis: made them work for us. [Wernher] Von Braun, who became the father of modern rocket science in the States, actually worked for the Nazis first. He made the V2 and the V3."

When quizzed about how much money the band have lost because of illegal downloading, he is philosophical. "It's certainly millions. I don't think it's tens of millions, but certainly millions. But so much of what we do with the licensing and the merchandising and all that…"

He trails off before snapping into a Dick Van Dyke cockney accent: "We do awwight, mate!"

It's easy to parody Kiss. They have become a cradle-to-grave marketing phenomenon (everyone knows about the Kiss condom and the Kiss casket, right?) that he is clearly very proud of. We get treated to some Kiss statistics that

Gene: "It always has and always will begin with a song"

GETTY

"THE SAD PART IS THAT THE FANS ARE KILLING THE VERY THING THEY LOVE"

GENE STANDS FIRMLY AGAINST MUSIC PIRACY

he obviously loves reeling off every opportunity he gets: "The Kiss faces are the four most recognised faces on planet Earth. You live here in Europe. Sweden is a monarchy. Do you know what the King of Sweden looks like? Well, everyone in Sweden knows what Kiss look like…"

In the excellent documentary *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, the late, great Ronnie James Dio says, with a mischievous glint in his eyes, that Simmons had found out that "O.J. – as in orange juice – had never been patented, so he patented it… so now every time anyone mentions O.J. [on television or film] …he gets some money for it." This, of course, was pernicious nonsense, but pernicious nonsense that many found it all too easy to believe, such is the Kiss corporation's unmitigated financial success – and unabashed avariciousness – over the last four decades.

So it's easy to parody Kiss, but not so easy to laugh at them. For elder statesmen they don't really seem that much out of touch. For example, when the subject of access comes up, Gene really talks some stone-cold sense. In an age where you can get to know every single facet of new bands seemingly 24/7 thanks to website Q and As, podcasts, YouTube interviews, webcasts, Spotify commentaries on albums, blogs, magazines, newspapers, TV shows, websites, Twitter, Facebook and MySpace, the bassist can see an obvious flaw.

"The philosophy of Kiss in the beginning was to create magic and to encourage the suspension of disbelief. What we did onstage is who we were and what we did offstage didn't matter. I remember getting letters asking, 'Do you eat?' The letters didn't ask, 'What do you eat?' They asked, 'Do you eat?' They couldn't quite imagine what we were. They didn't know what we actually looked like… we had created mystique."

When asked what he thinks of Spotify (the band's entire back catalogue is available on the streaming service) he replies with a brusque: "I don't care."

He is marginally more expansive on the subject of bands offering a pay-what-you-want download service, citing Radiohead's release of *In Rainbows* in 2007 as a failure.

"Bands could choose the Radiohead model; a great band but a silly commercial idea. 'We're going to put our music online and let people pay whatever they want.' Wait, you're saying I have a choice to pay or not pay money for this thing? What would you do? The masses would pay nothing if given the chance. In the real world, the vast majority of people paid nothing. It didn't work."

He doesn't have any less antipathy for crowd-funding companies such as Kickstarter, who ask subscribers or fans to invest in artistic projects in return for a slice of potential profits or personalised, limited edition gifts. He shouts: "NO! This is not a viable future for bands! Go back to capitalism.

When everything fails: charge. And hold the line. The Rolls Royce is never on sale. That's what they cost. Maintain the integrity. You'll only get the integrity you demand. Bands have to become businesses again and charge for what they do."

At the end of the day he is as damning of musicians for giving up what was once theirs as he is of downloaders for stealing it.

"Record labels are the remnants of a glorious bygone era. Bands were stupid… They always thought of the labels as 'the man' or 'my enemy'. Bitch! You don't even have a fucking clue what you are talking about! What other business would let you have an advance and let you keep it even if your record bombed? That's your best fucking friend, not your enemy."

It's hard not to presume that if he were 22 today, he'd pick a different industry to work in given how hard it is now to make a buck. But surprisingly, this isn't the case.

"If music runs in your bloodstream and you have that *Waterloo Sunset* moment where you love the music and when you pick up a guitar, it just comes out of you. The business comes later, and despite what people may or may not think about us, it always has and always will begin with a song.

"And the saddest part is that the new bands that are starting today, the new Prince, the new Kiss, the new AC/DC or anybody else, are not going to have the same chance that The Beatles and The Stones had because there used to be something called the record business which acted as a support system. They gave you the money, they were responsible for collecting the money, they were responsible for doing tour support and putting up the posters. And there was a structure and connection between band and fans and it's now the Wild West. It is chaos."

And exactly to the second, the interview ends on time. Because time is money and despite already having a lot, Gene Simmons is more than happy to get out there and earn some more.

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KISS

2014 was a huge year for Kiss. It marked the 40th anniversary of their classic debut album and also saw Paul, Gene and co finally inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame.

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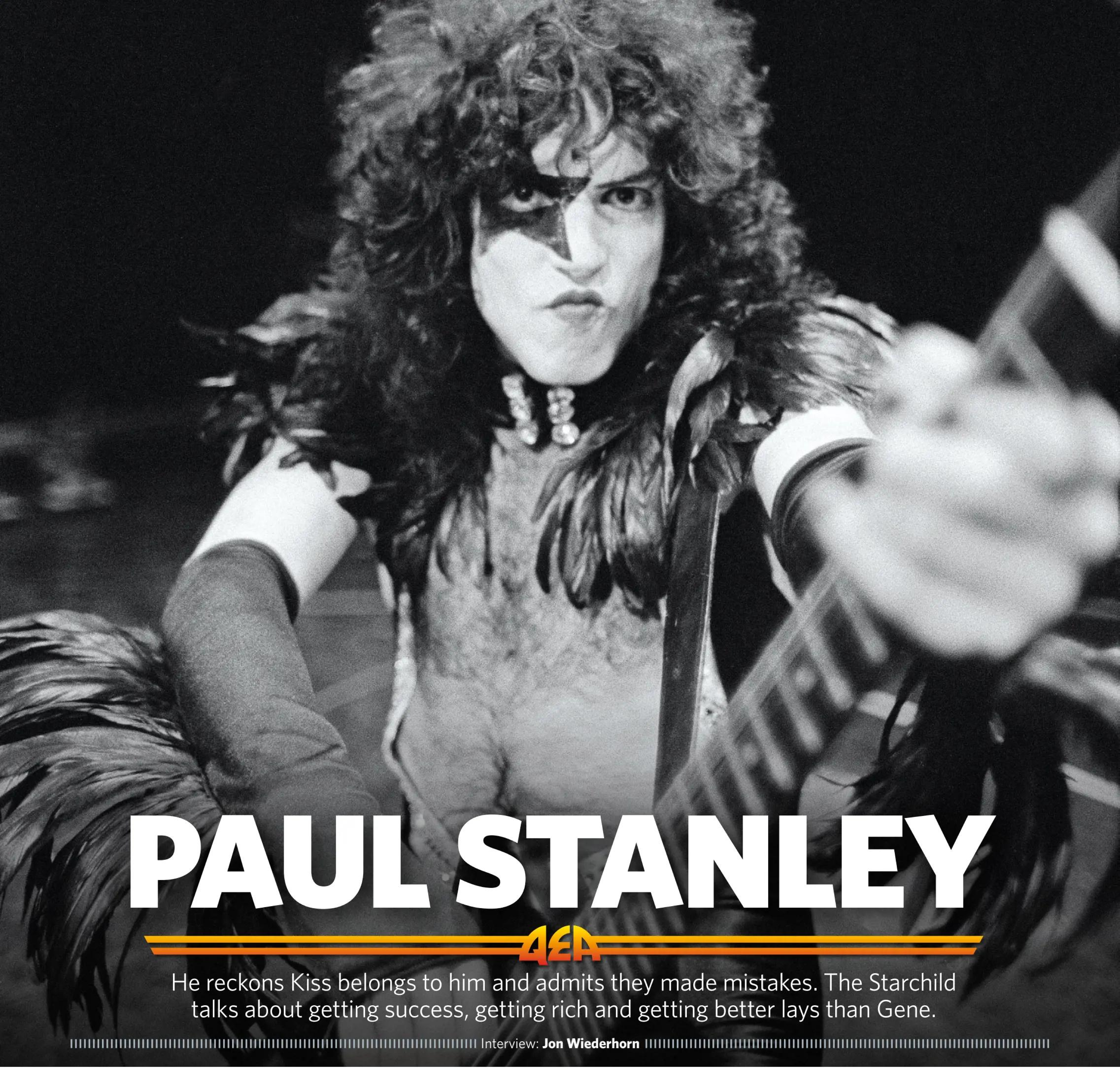
FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2014



PAUL STANLEY

Q&A

He reckons Kiss belongs to him and admits they made mistakes. The Starchild talks about getting success, getting rich and getting better lays than Gene.

Interview: **Jon Wiederhorn**

Kiss released their debut album 40 years ago this year. What were the sessions for that record like?
We were all green, but happy just to be in a studio and have food laid out for us. There was no downside to it. However, it struck me almost immediately that our recordings were such a timid fraction of what we were like in concert. I scratched my head about that, because the bands who were our contemporaries had much better-sounding albums. But what we did manage to capture was the piss and vinegar and the determination that was behind it all.

Were you rebelling against the trendiness of the arty New York punk bands who were around at the time?
No. I didn't hate that stuff, I just ignored it. All that stuff was crap. Claiming to be 'art' is never an excuse for not being able to play. Whenever we played with those bands we destroyed them. But in this small biosphere they had a credibility that we didn't, which had absolutely nothing to do with anything except where they hung out and what drugs they took.

Was that frustrating?
It threw me because we clearly were undeniable. At first I couldn't understand the swipes. We took what we did seriously, and that was intimidating to some people. Early on there were people who championed us. But I didn't realise the clock was ticking. As soon as we had national acceptance from fans, we were spurned by the people who initially championed us as well because we had 'sold out'. Well, if selling out means selling out arenas and theatres, I'm there.

It took a live album to break Kiss nationally. Why?
Everything we had put out prior to *Alive* pretty much died. To this day it's probably the best and most accurate representation of a live concert. We recorded it over multiple shows, and then we went into the studio and fixed it, polished it and doctored it to make it into an accurate representation of what everybody experienced at the show. We wanted listeners to get the sense

GETTY

I HAVE ALWAYS FELT THAT KISS IS MY BAND

of being immersed in chaos and bombast. So we recorded not only the show, we created that experience. We added cannons. We added bombs. We pumped up the audience by having separate loops of different fervoured audience reactions so we could control the sense that you were in the middle of it. I have no problem saying: "Yeah, we made that what it is."

When did the big royalty cheques start rolling in?

In spite of what any one of us wants the public to believe, we were naïve. We knew nothing about business. We were like sheep being led to slaughter. So I don't remember cheques. We were *told* we had a lot of money. We were told we had a million dollars. We were told we owned certain properties. But I was living in a one-bedroom apartment when we were doing three nights at Madison Square Garden. So I really can't say I have monetary recollections until much later on.

How much later?

Well, look. I wasn't living in a basement flat. But as time went on, in the eighties at some point, certain bells went off and it was time to really get to the bottom of things. The difference between one band and another is that when you find out you've been screwed, either you have the resources to survive and go forward and make up for lost time, or you wind up a question in Trivial Pursuit.

Gene is infamous for the number of women he's slept with, but who really got more play: him or you?

I think I had more that you would qualify as women. With him you were also throwing in cattle. But we both did very well. Gene likes to stand up and say: "Look at me, and look what I've done." And that's okay. But who had more? I don't know. He certainly had ones that I didn't want.

There has always been a certain push-pull between you and Gene over the years. Has that benefitted the band?

Totally. What moves a band forward isn't the similarities of the members, it's the differences. The combustibility of a band is what makes it great. But it's a matter of keeping your eye on the ball. Differences are fine, but you can't lose sight of the common goal.

What's the biggest argument the two of you have had?

My biggest point of contention for years was his disregard of the band in favour of his own agenda. I saw that as using the band as a stepping stone while not taking care of that stone, leaving it to me. Which I felt was a betrayal. But on top of that, he wanted to get paid equally, which was the ultimate insult. That happened through a good part of the eighties into the nineties.

What's the worst idea Kiss ever had?

The Elder. It was just folly. I'm not ashamed of it, but that and the movie *Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park* stand out as us getting off at the wrong exit.

But *Phantom Of The Park* was enjoyable for its kitsch value.

The only saving grace is that people saw it as kitschy. It was sold to us as *A Hard Day's Night* meets *Star Wars*. Well, it was horrible. But the thing is, Kiss is this huge tapestry; there are areas with mis-knotting or mis-embroidery, but that's part of the tapestry.

The original line-up reunited in the 90s. It started off with a bang. What went wrong?

The same things as the first time. I really hoped we could regroup with Ace and Peter and move forward. Even though those guys swore that they had made horrible mistakes and would never do it again, they quickly did the same things. There were drugs and alcohol and sycophantic friends. It all came back. It was the same thing all over again. It was mind-boggling that two people could win the lottery twice and throw it away. It was a shame to have to do tour after tour where we couldn't change the songs because the hard drive was full and you couldn't add any memory to it.

What's the closest you've come to quitting the band?

Never. Everybody could leave, but I'm staying. It has never occurred to me. As far as I was concerned, and always have felt, Kiss is my band. I hope everybody else feels the same way, but that's for them to decide. Everyone else can leave. I will bail water and do whatever is necessary – and have at different times – to keep this thing going.

If you had to rank the best bands of all time, where would you place Kiss?

Ooh, I've actually never been asked that. Would I unhesitatingly put us in the top ten? Absolutely. From there I would have to start working my way up and weighing out all the factors. That's really a question for our fans. I'm too close to answer it.

KISS FACTS

1 To make money in their early days, Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley sang a radio jingle for GMC trucks.

2 Paul and Gene's first time on record: backing vocals on a Lyn Christopher album in 1973.

3 The cover of Wicked Lester's abandoned album was reused by late-70s band Laughing Dogs.

4 Kiss bought their original studded belts and collars at S&M stores and pet shops in Greenwich Village.

JOEY RAMONE WAS WATCHING US

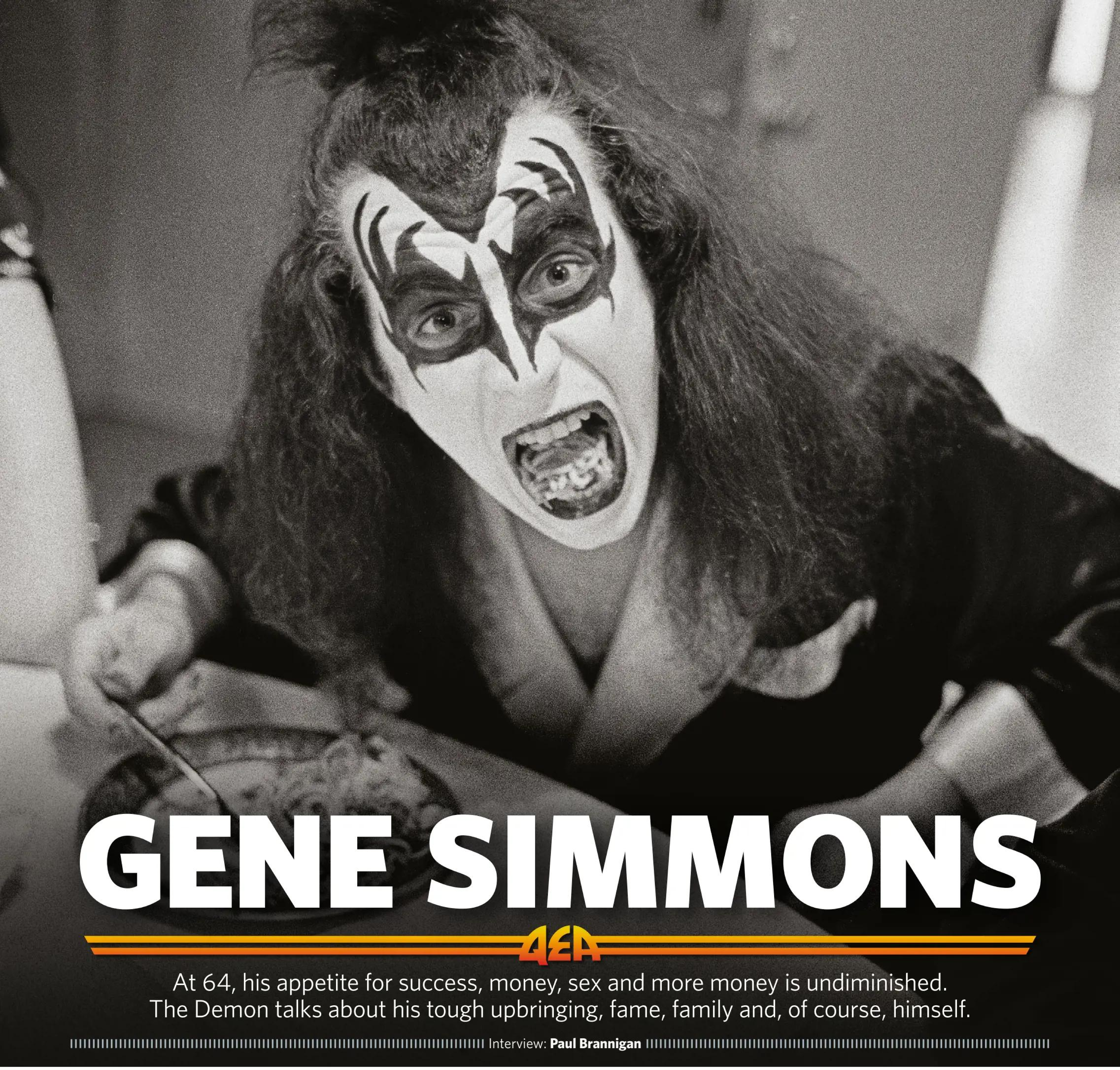
GETTY

On January 30, 1973, Kiss played their first gig. Paul Stanley recalls it.

"Coventry was originally a Masonic hall or a Polish Veteran's hall. When we played Coventry it was called Popcorn, and they were trying to change their image. It was a perfect relationship in that we brought a certain New York credibility to the club, so other bands started playing there too. Once the word got out about Kiss, it was a very rock'n'roll clientele. It was years later that I found out that the big tall guy watching us in the back with the specs on was Joey Ramone.

"First time we played there it was virtually empty. But whether there were four people at the first gig or 40,000, it didn't matter. Our path was already predetermined. I was completely oblivious to anything other than we were gonna be the biggest band around. Nothing ever seemed like a setback or a detour from that path. To me everything just seemed like days that I would look back on with nostalgia and a sense of awe. I was convinced that this was the road to world domination.

"We wore make-up then but it was not as sophisticated as it is now. The rest of the band pretty much looked the same, but I didn't, I wore just eye make-up and rouge. It was the same idea but different make-up. Our outfits were predominately black. I was wearing real high heels, skintight lurex pants, black knee socks and a black T-shirt that said 'KISS.' The costume cost about forty-five dollars for the shoes, three for the T-shirt, and about five dollars' worth of lurex. I made the pants myself because I couldn't afford to buy them. Instead I went out and bought the material. And then my father said: "Well, nice try but I'll buy you the pants… I admire you for wanting to make the pants, but you can't, you've never done it before." I said: "Oh yeah?" So I took my best pair of jeans apart, cut the lurex like the jeans, asked my mother to show me how the sewing machine worked, and made myself a pair of pants." **KS**



GENE SIMMONS

Q&A

At 64, his appetite for success, money, sex and more money is undiminished. The Demon talks about his tough upbringing, fame, family and, of course, himself.

Interview: **Paul Brannigan**

When you first had the idea of Kiss, had you identified a gap in the market, or were you driven by instincts?
Honestly, it wasn't so much a marketing assessment. Madison Avenue may have been figuring out how to sell products to people, but that process hadn't yet been applied to pop culture. I knew that it wasn't just about writing a song and then magically getting access to as much money and as many groupies as we liked, but our creation wasn't about manipulation, it was about emotion. Our idea was to put together the band we never saw on stage; we wanted to be The Beatles on steroids.

Is it fair to say Kiss were the most hated band in New York when they started?
A lot of bands in New York were hated back then. There were a lot of simple-minded life forms who had a narrow definition of what a heterosexual man should be, and then you had these kids dressing up in their sister's clothes and lipsticks and bravely challenging that – and often getting the shit beaten out of them. We were hated too, sure, but we were turning our dreams into reality, so punches and criticism just bounced off us.

Deep down, does it hurt you that Kiss have never been a critics' band?
Hell no. When we started playing with the 'cool' local bands, we realised they couldn't sing and couldn't play for shit. And no one cared but the critics. If you want to never sell a ticket or never sell a record – like the New York Dolls or the Velvet Underground – make sure the critics love you.

What's the best song you've written?
Well, *Deuce* is a song that defines us. I'd written all kinds of meandering nonsense for our previous band, but when I wrote *Deuce*, Paul and I knew we'd discovered the heartbeat of Kiss. It was inspired by *Bitch* by the Stones, but from the moment we played it, we knew we were our own men.

Have your parents ever seen Kiss play?
My mother came to see us play an event for the press, for the reopening of the Fillmore

GETTY

PAUL STANLEY IS THE SOUL OF KISS. I'M THE COCK

East in New York, on January 6, 1974. We just blew the place up. So we came off stage to meet the media afterwards, and my mother ran down to the front to Paul and told him how wonderful he was and how proud she was of him, and I was at the other side of the stage yelling: "Mom! I'm over here!" To this day, even close friends say they don't see me behind the make-up.

Do you think many people actually know who the real Gene Simmons is?
No. Which is fine with me. I'll paint the clichéd picture of Gene Simmons: on stage he's The Demon, he shits fire and eats kids; off stage he's arrogant, a businessman who only cares about money and chicks. And I'd say predominantly that's true. Ha ha!

Speaking of sex, where do you keep your infamous books of Polaroids of women you've slept with?
Well, I'm sixty-four now, and I can't wait to go out there on our fortieth anniversary and show the little boys how the big boys do it. With all due respect to the Stones and U2…

Wait. That's not an answer to the question I asked.
Sorry, you're always going to have to put up with a little self-aggrandising with me. Those books don't exist any more. When I got serious about marrying Shannon [Tweed] I had a heart-to-heart chat with her on camera, and I showed her those books and broke her heart. I had a TV show called *Gene Simmons' Family Jewels* at the time, and so we took those books and burnt them together on camera.

You and Paul Stanley are very different people. When were you most at one another's throats?
It never, ever came to that. Paul is much more emotional, and I'm drier. Paul will go see romantic movies, I'll throw up at them. Paul is the soul of Kiss and I'm… the cock.

What's the worst idea you've ever had for Kiss?
Well, *The Elder* was entirely my fault. But that started out as an idea for a movie, until [producer] Bob Ezrin read it and said: "This will be your *Tommy*." Oops! But that album refocused us. After that we were a wild animal, peeing on our territory and saying: "We make the rules, not you." We laid down the templates. When you see bands rocking out in sync, that's us. When you see bands putting up that two-fingered devil-horn salute, that started with Kiss.

Didn't Ronnie James Dio start that?
Well I've heard Ronnie say that to my face, and I said: "God bless you." I mean him no ill will, but I think he's wrong. Mine came from Spider-man doing his hand signal, as a homage to him. If you see me in photos, I'm sticking out my thumb. That's the sign in sign language which means 'I love you'.

With hindsight, could you have handled Kiss's 90s reunion differently?
Not really. It was torture from day one. Here's an example. *Spin* magazine gave us four separate covers to celebrate the reunion, and I walked up to Ace and said: "Look, Ace, you're on the cover of *Spin*." He looked at it, threw it on the ground and said: "Motherfucker!" and stormed out of the room. He said: "I don't like that fucking photo." You couldn't make this shit up – unless you're Ace or Peter and you're writing your own book.

Where would you rank Kiss among the all-time greats?
I don't care about history, respectfully. When a mountain climber climbs the highest peak in the world and finally reaches the summit, he doesn't look around and think: "I wonder who else has done this." He thinks: "Wow, look at me, on top of the world." I'm all about the here and now – those kinds of rankings and assessments are for you guys.

But you've accepted the invitation to join the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Your place in history must mean something to you.
Well, it does, because it means something to the fans. Respectfully, the Hall Of Fame doesn't mean all that much to us. There's no musicians on the panel, just critics making these decisions; these are the ones deciding that rap and disco artists belong in the Hall Of Fame. A lot of these artists are great, but they're not rock'n'roll. The term 'rock star' isn't just about music. Lady Gaga is a rock star, Margaret Thatcher was a rock star. But if you want to be a real rock star, you better have a guitar and be able to sing your own songs.

In 2014, would you say Gene Simmons is a happy man?
What do you think? For too long I was that twenty-year-old kid who's young, dumb and full of cum. But the rebel who did what the fuck he wanted to do is now sixty-four, and this is exactly who I want to be now. Will you still love me when I'm sixty-four? Of course you will. I'm loved by millions.

KISS FACTS

5 Gene unveiled his fire breathing act at New York's Academy Of Music on New Year's Eve, 1973…

6 …Sadly, it didn't go entirely as planned: the side of his head went up in flames.

7 The God Of Thunder nearly had a different career – the young Gene Simmons wanted to be a rabbi.

8 Kiss's first single, *Nothin' To Lose*, was about anal sex. *'I thought about the back door'* is the giveaway.

Gene Simmons with his own son, Nick, in 2011. GETTY

I WAS AFRAID I'D TURN INTO MY FATHER. AND I DID

The apple didn't fall far from the tree for Gene Simmons.

"My mother, father and I had a tough life in Israel. No TV, no radio, no toothbrush, no toilet, just an outhouse, a hole in the ground. We had nothing. When I was seven years old my father abandoned us. It was left to my mother to put food on the table and keep me safe. I was quietly angry all my life at my father. Not that he left, but that he left with no explanation. 'Listen, kid, I'll explain it later in life to you when you get older.' That didn't happen. I thought he took the coward's way out.

"We took the *Gene Simmons' Family Jewels* TV show to Israel, and this good-looking guy about six-foot-three comes walking over to me. He spoke to me in Hebrew and said: 'Hi, I'm your brother, Kobe." It was mind-blowing, like being in one of those alternate realities.

"Through them I learned stuff about my father. He made furniture by hand. He spoke between nine and thirteen languages – Kenyan, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, English and others. He should have been in the government or teaching.

"I'll tell you a story about my father as told to me by a waitress who serves us lunch at the Parker Meridien hotel in New York City. She comes over and says: 'Oh, Gene Simmons. I knew your father when I was working at a coffee shop in Tel Aviv. This old man used to come in every day with his one good leg, and he would sit in the same corner and have his same espresso and ask for his morning sweet.' And she said that every day he would ask her to come over and say: 'Why don't you make an old man happy and sit on my leg.' Just fearless. Old, one leg and still going after the chicks.

"My siblings are younger than I am, so they came through the four or five other marriages he had, not counting the girlfriends. When they found my father when he passed away, there was a thirty-five-year-old Russian woman with him.

"I was afraid I'd turn into my father, and in some ways I did. There wasn't a female alive or dead that he wouldn't try to mount, and the same went for me. It may be a story that's common for the species and I'm no different, but I did not abandon my family and I never will." **KS**

'…I wanna put my log in your fireplace.'

I'M WITH THE BRAND

Own any of this Kiss merchandise? You could be sitting on a goldmine.

KISS ON TOUR GAME

Dating from 1978. Players answer trivia questions and move game pieces in their quest to follow Kiss on tour in LA, London, New York, Tokyo and other locales.
What's it worth? $100

ICE CREAM

Produced for the 1980 Australian tour, the popsicles were sold in four collectible boxes with a photo and bio on the back of either Paul, Gene, Ace or Eric Carr.
What's it worth? $1,500 (box & wrapper)

PINBALL MACHINE

Manufactured by Bally in 1978, this is regarded as the most highly prized item a Kiss fan can own. And if you ever gain entrance to Gene Simmons's office, you can play his.
What's it worth? $3,000

KISS KASKET

First made available in 2001, this is equally useful as a storage unit, a beer cooler or a one-way ticket to the hereafter. Pantera's Dimebag Darrell was buried in one.
What's it worth? $3,299

HONDA MOTORCYCLE

Despite an advertisement in late '78 which depicted Gene and Paul on a 'cycle that was 'coming soon', the so-called Honda Hawk never went on sale. The prototype on the poster is the only existing model.
What's it worth? Probably a fortune. If you can get your hands on it.

KISS FACTS

9 Kiss's first major press coverage wasn't in a music magazine. Nope, it was in *Mandate* – a gay mag.

10 Kiss's *Firehouse* was inspired by The Move's *Fire Brigade* – written by Roy Wood, one of Paul's idols.

11 The classic "You wanted the best, you got the best" intro was 'inspired' by the slogan from a Toyota ad.

12 Gene's stage movements were inspired by Ymir, from sci-fi film *20 Million Miles To Earth*.

GETTY

ACE FREHLEY

The Spaceman recalls the buzz of Kiss's early days – and how everything changed once the money started rolling in.

Words: **Ken Sharp**

This year is the 40th anniversary of Kiss's first album. What do you remember about those sessions?
I used to stress about the solos. I hadn't blossomed into a singer or songwriter yet so all I focused on was doing the best possible solos. Everything else was gravy. It was a combination of nerves and excitement. I knew we had a special chemistry that was really gonna take off, it was just a matter of time.

When you told your family you were in a band who wore make-up, did they think you were crazy?
No, I was already a loony tune before I joined Kiss. Kiss just allowed me to express myself in a more flamboyant way. My parents were thrilled because I was off the street and I wasn't getting into trouble.

Was there a leader in Kiss in those early days?
There was no leader; everything was democratic. Some people did more work in certain areas than others. I was always a creative guy and always the peacemaker. I wanted everybody to get along.

Kiss had a share of conflict within the band. Did that work to your advantage creatively?
We were like family, and within a family there's always going to be disagreements. The friction for the most part was positive. Everybody knew everyone else's limits. Peter had a bad temper; you didn't want to push him too far because you were afraid he was gonna snap. And I could snap too, especially if I was loaded. Paul and Gene were more sedate but those guys were always workaholics.

It took a while for Kiss to break through. Did you ever have any doubts you would make it?
I've always said from the time I was fifteen or sixteen that I was gonna be a rock star. If

WE ALL MADE MISTAKES. I MIGHT HAVE MADE MORE THAN THE OTHERS

'But I knew when I was in the suds and swimmin' around…'

Kiss wouldn't have happened it would have been with another band. There were times when we were on the road for six months living in Holiday Inns and eating out of a can, so you get a little despondent from time to time, but we continued to believe in what we were doing. *Alive!* broke everything wide open and after that we were headlining everywhere.

When the windfall hit, how much was your first huge royalty check?
I don't remember the exact figure, but when money started coming in everybody in the band bought cars and houses; I bought my Porsche, I bought Corvettes, Cadillacs. I remember sitting in a board meeting and our business manager telling us we were all millionaires.

What changed for you once Kiss became hugely successful?
People treat you differently, especially people you didn't know on the way up. When you get on the road everybody you meet is treating you like you're some kind of god. The way I kept grounded was staying close with old friends who knew me before I was famous. It was the only way I could feel normal. I couldn't hang out with people that I had met once I became famous because they were treating me special and I didn't know if they had ulterior motives. It was strange.

You had your share of ups and downs in Kiss on a personal level. When was the band most unified?
We had that feeling in the beginning. In my opinion, what really started changing everybody was money. Once the money started rolling in and we all started getting our suites and surrounding ourselves with different people, we started growing apart. Everybody started writing on their own; it wasn't collaboration any more. It was the beginning of the end.

How did it feel to finally be accepted by the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame?
I always felt we were gonna get in. You can only ignore Kiss for so long. I knew they would have to eventually buckle. It felt great but unfortunately the happy feelings were marred by other people's decisions.

Your autobiography is titled *No Regrets*. Be honest, now: do you have any regrets about your behaviour while with Kiss?
I made tons of mistakes; we all did. I might have made more than the other members, but in sobriety I realised I had to make those mistakes to get to where I am. You have to make an asshole out of yourself sometimes for the light bulb to go off in your head where you go: "Wow, I can't do that any more." I hit my bottom more than once. I mean, thank God, I have a strong constitution and, knock on wood, I've got a clean bill of health. ☻

KISS FACTS

13 Funk legend George Clinton wore Gene's boots for a 1974 album promo by his band Parliament.

14 Kiss's second album, *Hotter than Hell*, was originally titled *The Harder They Come*.

15 Ace Frehley's solo on *She* was a lift of Robby Krieger's solo on The Doors' *Five To One*...

16 ...while his lead on *Love Gun* cops from the Blues Magoos' late-60s hit *We Ain't Got Nothin'*

GETTY

"I DON'T WANT TO SEE THE SHOW. I WANT TO BE IN IT!"

In 1975, *Creem* writer **Jaan Uhelszki** became the first (and last) journalist to sing with Kiss on stage. Thirty-nine years on, she looks back.

As Kiss finally head-butt their way into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, I find myself reminiscing about that cold May night in 1975, in the small coal-mining town of Johnstown, Pennsylvania when I was momentarily let into the line-up.

How? Mainly because Kiss weren't the rock behemoth they are now. The four guys, still relatively fresh from the streets of Queens, NY were only just getting used to the feel of nylon tights and platform shoes. They were the first signing on Casablanca Records, and the label had gone to extraordinary lengths to break their rock'n'roll oddity; they'd promised journalists baubles, drugs and junkets to Los Angeles to see the band perform. Surely they wouldn't baulk at letting me become a member of Kiss for a single night and writing about it?

I called Larry Harris, Casablanca's VP/promotion, and told him: "I don't want to see the show. I want to be *in* it!" To my surprise, he agreed. He made only one stipulation: that I wouldn't refer to Kiss as a glitter band. Easier said than done.

I planned to call the story 'I Dreamed I Was On Stage With Kiss In My Maidenform Bra', after a long-running ad campaign that depicted women waking up half-dressed in their undergarments in unexpected places, seemingly without a clue to how they came to be driving a chariot, or accepting an Academy Award, or chasing a spy in their brassiere.

Once back home I got my battered black Samsonite and packed essentials – black tights, black underwear, good black shoes, and make-up remover. Battling frigid temperatures and near-crippling stage fright, and without the benefit of a rehearsal, I was semi-prepared to fool some of the people of Johnstown. But first I had to endure Gene, Paul, Ace and Peter savaging my hair and make-up, outfitting me in their neo-goth finery and ridiculing my ignorance of cosmetology. "Why don't know anything about putting on make-up and you're a chick?" asked Ace, advising me to smear on cocoa butter to seal my pores. Each member got to 'take a crack' at me, sketching his own symbol on my face, so my *masque de gig* would be a combo of theirs.

Then the road manager led us out into the dark tunnel that led to the stage area. I trailed behind the other four, charged with adrenaline and bravado, and followed the band up the stairs, nearly forgetting that my part – "four minutes or one song, whichever came first" – wouldn't come until the end of the set.

"Okay, you're on!" the road manager finally shouted, pushing me forward. Unbelievably, I felt instantly at ease on the two-foot-high stage. I was taken over by the thundering bass and throbbing drums, and began to bob and gyrate instinctively, holding my red Fender guitar (which they refused to plug in) "low and sexy", as Paul had instructed.

I dogged Paul's every move, getting into the macabre calisthenics of the act. "I wanna rock and roll all nite and party every day," I shouted into the mic, realising that the crowd had absolutely no idea who I was, or, even worse, didn't even recognise there was an extra Kiss member. I remember thinking the only difference was that I was the only Kiss member with tits.

And to tell you the truth, I'd always thought it would stay that way. And it has – if you don't count Hallie Eisenberg, an eight-year-old, three-foot-10 spokes-midget for Pepsi, with ratty hair and reprehensible manners. She was featured in an advert with Kiss in 2000, sporting her own platform boots, rhinestone guitar and leather frock, and made up to look like one of the band, just like I was almost 39 years ago.

Which, frankly, made me want to strangle her with my Maidenform bra.

'...All of a sudden I heard this rumblin' sound'

HARD TIMES

Misguided solo records, a poorly received movie, a baffling concept album, internal tensions and external pressures… How Kiss snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Words: **James Clifford**

Kiss kicked off 1978 on top of the world. Since the release of their breakthrough *Alive!* album just over two years earlier, they had become America's favourite rock'n'roll band. In the previous 12 months alone they had put out two hugely successful albums in the shape of *Love Gun* and *Alive II*, played a triumphant home-town show at New York's Madison Square Garden and prompted scenes to rival Beatlemania on their very first tour of Japan.

The cover of 1976's *Destroyer* had portrayed Kiss as all-conquering heroes, gargantuan generals offering up a rallying cry for the massed ranks of the Kiss Army. To an entire generation they were The Beatles, the Stones and Marvel Comics superheroes The Avengers rolled into one, and backed by the most ruthlessly efficient merchandising operation ever seen.

It was the devotion of the Kiss Army that would make 1978 the band's most successful year yet. But as the Kiss machine started to overheat under the strain of internal tensions and external pressures, it was that same following who would desert them just as quickly, sending the band to the edge of the wilderness – a period which it would take many years to claw themselves back from.

"When the records are selling and the lunchboxes are selling and everyone wants to sleep with *you*, you don't tend to be too introspective," says Gene Simmons. "Of course there were problems, and of course it damaged us. But that's easy to say now. It's not so easy to pick up on at the time."

What the Kiss Army couldn't see at the beginning of 1978 were the cracks in the make-up. A distinct fault line divided the band into two camps: in one, Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons were the no-nonsense, teetotal workaholics; in the other, Ace Frehley and Peter Criss were the loose-rolling, good-time party animals.

Early in their career all four had pulled in the same direction for the greater good, despite the differences in personalities. But their stellar success inevitably brought with it a whole set of problems. Chief among

GETTY

'Through the luminescent night, on beams of neon light…'

WE BECAME RICH. WE LOST OUR BACKBONE

these were Frehley and Criss's wholesale embrace of the party lifestyle. The combination of fame and financial reward proved to be a toxic mix for the pair. Ill-equipped to handle the pressures of success, they numbed themselves with drugs, alcohol and coteries of hangers-on.

In Frehley's case this manifested itself in an inability to play to the standard Stanley and Simmons demanded. *Alive II* had featured three live sides, plus a fourth side comprising all-new studio material. But aside from his own track, *Rocket Ride*, the guitarist was absent from the new songs – his place secretly taken by Bob Kulick, a friend of the band who had originally auditioned for the guitarist spot when Kiss formed in 1973.

"It went quickly from being the Four Musketeers, and all for one and one for all, to people not pulling their weight and sabotaging what you want to do in an ongoing power-play," says Stanley. "In plain English, wanting to fuck things up."

While the band could apply a temporary sticking plaster to their internal problems, the external issues were less easy to control. Kiss had become victims of their own success, their fame and omnipresence creating a seemingly insatiable appetite for 'product'. While Kiss-branded lunchboxes and bed sheets could be mass-produced ad infinitum, the music – the rock on which the whole operation was built, even if it increasingly didn't seem like it to their detractors – was an altogether scarcer commodity. The machine needed feeding, but in this case the supply couldn't keep up with the demand.

Inevitably there was pressure from their label, Casablanca, to strike while the iron was hot. In the absence of a new album, Casablanca assembled *Double Platinum*, a two-disc 'best of' whose title exuded bulletproof confidence. Among the remixed hits and fan favourites was a new version of the old classic *Strutter*, complete with a subtle but distinct disco rhythm. Little did the Kiss Army know, but it pointed the way to the future.

"Redoing that song was [Casablanca head] Neil Bogart's idea, so we could get mileage out of *Strutter* if it was recut with more of a – quote-unquote – 'disco' feel," says Stanley. "So we went along with it, but it was totally unnecessary."

Released in April 1978, *Double Platinum* didn't quite live up to its name – it sold a million copies that year, though sales didn't hit two million until 2003. But what the band and label didn't know was that it would mark a tipping point for Kiss.

Having conquered the charts, stages and supermarket food-container aisles of America, the next logical step for Kiss was the big screen. In May 1978 the band began filming *Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park*, a film that was pitched to them by producers Hanna-Barbera as "*Star Wars* meets *A Hard Day's Night*". The filming was an unmitigated disaster, not least because it took a sledgehammer to the already fragile relationships between the band members. Things got so bad that they weren't on speaking terms with each other.

"By that point Peter and Ace had become unbearable," recalls Gene Simmons. "During the filming of *Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park* they would sometimes not show up on the set. Peter was so indecipherable that they had to have an actor substitute his entire vocals. And this of course really pissed him off."

"During filming, everyone's telling you how great it's going to be and that's what keeps you going," adds Stanley. "Then you see it, and it's awful."

Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park was indeed a stinker. The inane script, dodgy production values and the band's own limited acting abilities showed they were human after all – something which defeated the point of what Kiss was all about. Its ratings were high, a result of the Kiss Army's limitless desire to lap up anything with their heroes' names on it, but on every other level it was a disaster.

Drug and alcohol abuse and out-of-control egos had pushed Kiss precipitously close to breaking up. Manager Bill Aucoin decided the best way to contain the flames of discontent was for each member to record a solo album.

"Ace and Peter were so upset with

KISS FACTS

17 Paul Stanley's debut as lead guitarist on a Kiss song? *C'mon And Love Me*, from *Dressed To Kill*.

18 Stevie Wonder's *Fingertips Part 2* inspired Paul Stanley's rap on the *Alive!* version of *100,000 Years*.

19 The voice of the newscaster at the beginning of *Detroit Rock City*? Producer Bob Ezrin.

20 The bass line on *Detroit Rock City* echoed Curtis Mayfield's hit *Freddy's Dead*.

ROSS HALFIN

I ALWAYS ADMIRED THEIR FEARSOME SPIRIT

Joe Perry on the friendship – and rivalry – between Aerosmith and Kiss.

"Before we did some tour dates with Kiss, I remember hearing their album for the first time at [Boston DJ] Maxanne Sartori's apartment – her boyfriend at the time was Billy Squier. Maxanne played me the record and I really liked it, especially *Strutter*. It was good, solid rock'n'roll.

"Aerosmith played a few shows with Kiss in early '74; they had so much production and it made us adjust. I remember the drum riser breaking a lot. At that point they were still trying to do their show on a shoestring. There were some weapons pulled at that Michigan Palace show. The vibes between the road crew wasn't too good. They were at each other's throats. Aerosmith weren't huge in '74; we were battling to build an audience. There was no MTV or internet, it was all about playing live and making an impression on an audience. Kiss was in the same place as us.

"We always checked out the opening band to see what you were up against. We were both on the way up, so I always looked at it as us having a friendly competition with them. When I went out to see Kiss play, the audience was going crazy. And they didn't have a big show back then. That first record was straight-ahead rock'n'roll, nothing fancy. I thought they were a little hokey, but the audience was going nuts. I watched them for a while and then went back into the dressing room and was shaking my head, saying: "Is that what people want? Are we gonna have to dress up in tutus and put on Halloween costumes to make it?"

"And while we both went off in drastically different directions, we shared the big dream of making it at any cost. I always admired Kiss's fearsome spirit and rock'n'roll attitude, and knew they were gonna hit it big." **KS**

Kissin' time: Gene Simmons with then-squeeze Cher.

GETTY

"THE BAND WAS FALLING PREY TO EVERY KIND OF DISTRACTION"

the band, with themselves, drugs, booze, all that stuff, that they were threatening to leave the band," says Simmons. "Bill, bless him, was trying to keep the band together. Ace was unhappy. He was like George Harrison in The Beatles: 'You're not doing enough of my songs.' So Bill said: 'Why don't you all do a solo record?' Bill made it up on the spot. And Neil Bogart always loved big ideas, so he decided to stick out all four solo albums on the same day, with the Kiss logo in the top left hand corner."

Released in September 1978, the four Kiss solo albums have gone down as a hubristic folly. That reputation does them a disservice. Frehley's garage rock'n'roll album is rightly hailed as the best of the four and one of the great records in the band's canon. Stanley's Kiss-alike album and Simmons's gloriously schizophrenic set have their charms. Only Criss's R&B and lounge jazz-influenced album truly let the side down.

"We weren't speaking at that point," says Stanley. "We didn't all kiss and hug and say: 'Good luck with your album.' It would be dishonest not to say that I wanted mine to be better than everybody else's. But I worried about what all the other albums would be like. I didn't need anybody to fail. I thought that failure would reflect badly on the band."

He was right to worry. An administrative error meant that too many albums were sent out to record shops, meaning that thousands were returned unsold (prompting one wag to quip: "They shipped gold and came back platinum"). Cumulatively the four solo albums sold as many as a regular Kiss record, but the perception was that they had flopped. The band weren't strangers to failure – their first three albums had barely made a dent – but this was different. The weight of expectations from their fans, from the media, from their label and from themselves had been too heavy to bear. It was a major blow.

"Doing the solo albums was the biggest mistake we ever did," says Criss. "It got to be: who's gonna have the best album? Who's gonna outsell whose album? That's when that ego, that cancer, came in. I would be surrounded by people who would say: 'You don't need those fucking jerks.'"

But the perceived commercial failure wasn't their only problem. The success of Ace Frehley's solo single, *New York Groove*, had given the insecure guitarist's ego a huge boost, precipitating further strains.

"The success of my solo album opened my eyes and made me a little more cocky," the guitarist admits. "That planted the seed for me that eventually I was gonna do my own thing."

By the time Kiss reconvened in the spring of 1979 to start work on their new album, *Dynasty*, the damage had been done. Literally, in the case of Peter Criss – the drummer had been nearly killed in a car crash the previous year. His injuries, combined with spiralling drug abuse, meant that he was either unwilling or unable to play on the album. He wrote and appeared on just one track, *Dirty Livin'*. For the rest of the album South African tub-thumper Anton Fig sat behind the drum kit.

Criss's situation only helped push tensions within Kiss to an all-time high. "The band was falling prey to vices, compulsions and every kind of distraction," says Stanley. "That album really is born out of that."

If Kiss hoped that *Dynasty* would steady the boat after the misfires of *Phantom Of The Park* and the solo albums, they were out of luck. The album's first single, the Stanley-written disco song *I Was Made For Loving You*, gave them a Top 20 US hit and helped push *Dynasty* itself into the *Billboard* Top 10, but its overt disco stylings had alienated the hard-core factions of the Kiss Army, who wanted the old sound back. Worse, their merchandising success had come around to bite them on the backside: the lunchboxes and duvet covers had brought in a wave of younger fans, which further eroded the band's credibility among their original following.

***Phantom* blues: Kiss's 1978 silver-screen debut was an abject failure.**

'Whiplash, heavy metal accident…'

The subsequent Dynasty tour was fraught with major problems. Ticket sales were flat and some shows were even cancelled because of poor sales. A struggling economy was partly to blame, but so was the fact their hard-core following were put off by the growing presence of pre-teen fans drawn in by the head-spinning array of Kiss merchandise. The band's sinking credibility wasn't helped by the fact that Gene Simmons had been seduced by Hollywood, and was now a fixture in the gossip columns with his new girlfriend, Cher.

Kiss had committed the cardinal sin: they were no longer dangerous.

The band entered the 1980s as followers rather than innovators. The huge and loyal fan base they had built in just three years was shrinking to its bare bones. None of the albums that followed – 1980's unloved *Unmasked*, 1981's over-reaching *Music From The Elder*, 1982's faintly desperate compilation *Killers*, and even the same year's artistically sound but commercially unsteady *Creatures Of The Night* – could patch up the holes below the water line.

Peter Criss left in 1980, and was replaced on drums by Eric 'The Fox' Carr; Ace Frehley followed him out two years later, and mercurial six-stringer Vinnie Vincent stepped gingerly into his predecessor's custom-made platform shoes.

"The interesting part about failure is you don't realise your own participation in it," says Paul Stanley. "We were looking around ourselves going: 'What's happening? And how can it possibly be happening?' But we'd lost the plot. We became immersed in the trappings of success, so we were clueless. We were rich and we became complacent. We lost our backbone. People weren't wrong for abandoning the band. The band had abandoned itself."

Not everything was lost. The fan base might have been depleted in the US, but overseas it was a different matter, with Kiss fans in South America, Australia and Europe picking up the slack. Kiss's artistic and commercial fortunes were partially restored by 1983's *Lick It Up*, which coincided with the band taking off their make-up and reinventing themselves as MTV-friendly pretty boys (or at least as pretty as Gene Simmons could get). While their diehard fans kept them afloat through the decidedly lean 1980s, the days of a vast and devoted Kiss Army were behind them – at least until the original band reunited, in make-up, in 1996.

"Did we lose our way?" Gene Simmons poses the question. "If you're talking about the music, or the profile of the band, or our sales, in America, then yes. But if you're talking about the band adapting and surviving and clawing back a fan base that most other bands would have lost, then no. We stayed true to ourselves."

KISS FACTS

21 Alice Cooper's guitarist Dick Wagner played acoustic guitar on Kiss' 1976 hit *Beth*.

22 Kiss re-purposed a Tesla coil from 1931 film *Frankenstein* for the *Destroyer* tour.

23 Ace Frehley scored highest in a group IQ test in the 70s. His score was 164 – 'genius' level.

24 The band who opened more Kiss shows than any other in the 1970s? Rush.

GETTY

PETER CRISS

Q&A

The Kitty Kat on how he helped Gene and Paul learn their trade – and how he encouraged Eric Carr to sing *Beth*.

Interview: **Ken Sharp**

This year is the anniversary of Kiss's debut album. What are your memories of working on it?
I'd already had a feeling [of excitement] with the Chelsea album. So working with Kiss on the first album wasn't as exciting for me because I'd already done it before. Having played clubs for many years and done a lot of recording, I was hoping this would be the band to make it.

Early on, Kiss played small venues such as Coventry, The Daisy and Hotel Diplomat. How did those shows shape the band?
For me it was not a thrill to be playing clubs, being I had ten years of that already. But clubs help your performance and give you experience; they're like a training base. And Gene and Paul needed that. Ace and I already had some, so we all needed it to become one.

Kiss went for years without making much money. When you finally got a big royalty cheque what did you spend it on?
When my grandmother died she didn't have a gravestone. So when I got enough money I made sure I got that gravestone for her.

How did all the Kiss merchandise sit with you?
I was more into the music, not Barbie dolls and comic books. Me and Ace, we were more on the same plane about it being about the music; Paul and Gene were more into the commercial end of it. For me a rock band isn't about merchandise, a rock band is about music. But don't get me wrong, I thought it was cool to have some of that merch.

Do you think the four solo albums didn't get a fair hearing from the critics because of who Kiss were?
They never liked our band and never gave us good reviews, that was their attitude. But we made it anyway, so what do they know?

You've been very complimentary about Eric Carr, the man who replaced you in Kiss in 1980.
Eric Carr was one of the sweetest guys I ever met. He played with a lot of feel; he put his heart and soul into it. I remember when he called me when Gene and Paul were making him sing *Beth* (on *Smashes, Thrashes And Hits*). He called me and was really upset, and asked me to please forgive him because he felt it was a disrespectful thing for him to do. But they were making him do it, so I said to him: "Don't worry about it Eric, I understand."

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU TRUST

What was it like getting the call that Kiss were finally being inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame?
It was like Christmas. The fans really got us in. They wanted this for so many years. I was happy for the Kiss Army to win that fight for us. The Hall finally came to their senses at last.

If you could go back 40 years, what career advice would you give to the young Peter Criss?
Be careful who you trust.

DRESSED TO KILL

Forget the songs and stage props – nothing sums up how Kiss have changed over the years like their costumes…

Illustrations: **Jimbob Isaac**

1973 | **1974** | **1975** | **1976** | **1977/78** | **1979** | **1980**

WWW.JIMBOBISAAC.COM

'…and it's ready to bite.'

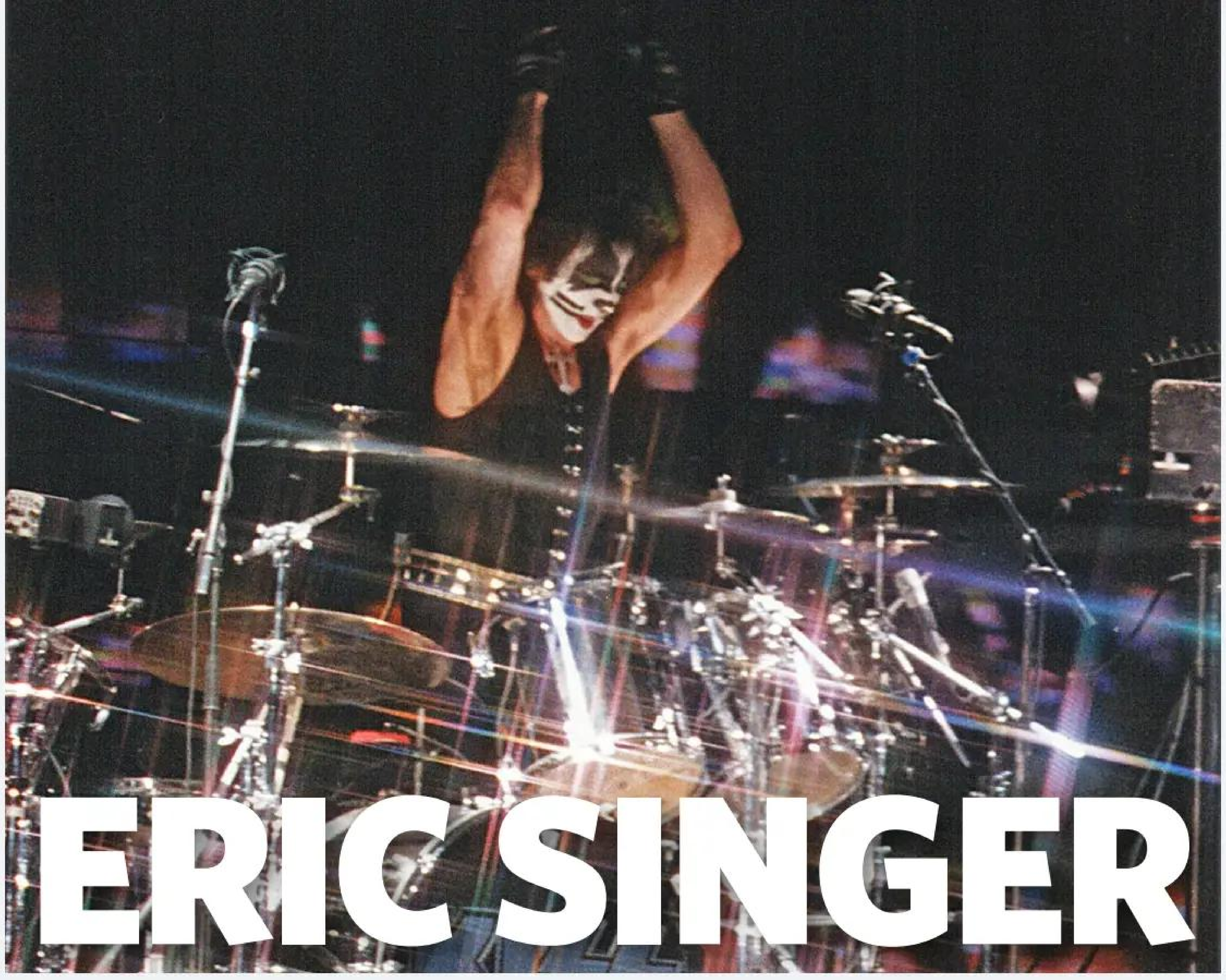
KISS FACTS

25 Kiss' first comic book appearance: *Howard The Duck*, in May 1977.

26 Eddie and Alex Van Halen played on demos of *Got Love For Sale* and *Christine Sixteen*.

27 The Cop from the Village People sang backing vocals on 1977's *Tomorrow And Tonight*.

28 Elvis Presley's death nixed plans to cover *Jailhouse Rock* on *Alive II*.



GETTY

ERIC SINGER

Replacing a fan-loved founder of a band is never easy. When that member returns it's even more difficult.

Interview: **Dave Ling**

Your way into Kiss was via playing on Paul Stanley's solo tour in 1989.
Yeah. Until then I'd never met anybody in Kiss. Then Paul asked me to play on some demos of his songs because their drummer, Eric Carr, didn't live in LA. I became a part of a posse of musicians that would help out Paul. Gene had his own team of guys.

You replaced Eric Carr when he died in 1991. That must have been tough.
Let me tell you, it sucked. My emotions were mixed. I knew that some fans wouldn't accept it, which was like being thrown into a firestorm. But that's how it always is with Kiss.

In 1992, you said: "Did you ever see that guy Hercules who held up the world? That was Paul holding up Kiss. It's why he's in such good shape."
I'll be honest, by the *Alive!* album my fan-dom had waned a little – that was their last of their records that I bought. At that time I wasn't very aware of their inner workings.

Around the same time, Gene said of your appointment: "It was down to whether or not he would go and get the sandwiches".
Oh, I was there because of Paul. Even though I'd played on the record *[Revenge]*, I wasn't automatically going to join Kiss.

You must have learned quickly about the Simmons-Stanley axis?
Gene loves the sound of his own voice, we all know that, but nothing happens in Kiss unless Paul Stanley says it does.

How did you deal with Peter Criss returning in 1996?
I've never denied that it made me unhappy. But until you've worked in this business for a living you'll never understand how it works. I never thought they'd do it – I didn't think that Ace and Peter were capable of doing it, anyway.

You rejoined Kiss two years later, but then the original Cat returned again.
Yeah. That time I was definitely not happy. Like I say, there are politics and economics in the music business. Fans think they know what's going on but, with respect, they don't.

Kiss and the Hall Of Fame: discuss.
I have always withheld any comment on the Hall Of Fame. I'm the only member of this band that's never said anything. It's not that I don't have an opinion, I just won't share it. It's the same opinion I had before Kiss was inducted. I don't agree with the way they choose the bands, but I won't resort to bashing.

> **I WAS NOT HAPPY ABOUT PETER**

It sound as though you don't have much interest in attending.
Let me say this: Gene, Paul and Tommy are my team-mates. I'm in Kiss and I'll do whatever they want me to do. In whatever capacity they want me, I'll be there.

You've been in the band for 16 years all told. That's two more than Peter Criss.
After Gene and Paul, I've been in Kiss the longest – longer than Ace Frehley. But I'm fully aware that I wouldn't have a job but for what Gene and Paul created.

YOU WANTED THE BEST...

...you got the best. Here are the 40 Greatest Kiss Anthems, as voted for by *you*.

Words: **Geoff Barton, Paul Elliott, Ken Sharp**

GETTY

40 WAR MACHINE

One of the heaviest tracks Kiss have recorded was, surprisingly, co-written by Gene Simmons, Bryan Adams and Adams's writing partner Jim Vallance. Also surprising is the fact that Simmons came up with the bones of the song while tinkering on a cheap miniature synthesiser. Bombastic, powerful and badass, The Demon's foreboding vocals on *War Machine* are full of scowling menace.

39 TOMORROW

Paul Stanley has dismissed 1980's *Unmasked* as "a pretty crappy album", but there is one track on the record that he still loves. "*Tomorrow* is a really great song," he says. He's right – it's a pop-rock classic, and the hit that never was.

38 FOREVER

Although the 1989 album *Hot In The Shade* is now all but forgotten, this masterful, acoustic-based power ballad was a Top 10 hit in the US. Paul wrote it with the king of power ballads – and of bad hair – Michael Bolton.

37 UNHOLY

Gene Simmons: "I got the idea for *Unholy* from a song that [Kiss collaborator] Adam Mitchell wrote that Doro Pesch recorded called *Unholy Love*. I just loved the word 'unholy'. Vinnie Vincent and I wrote the lyric together."

36 SURE KNOW SOMETHING

For 1979's *Dynasty* album, Paul Stanley wrote this brilliant pop song with producer Vini Poncia, co-writer of Leo Sayer's hit *You Make Me Feel Like Dancing*. With its smooth funk vibe and killer chorus, *Sure Know Something* is high-class Kiss.

35 MODERN DAY DELILAH

From 2009's *Sonic Boom*, this track incorporates all the hallmarks of a quintessential Kiss tune: a fiery, muscular riff hot-wired to a soaring lead vocal by Stanley (the song's writer), and sporting tough, kiss-off lyrics to a love gone bad. The band's first single in 11 years, the song was the opener on the *Sonic Boom* tour.

34 MAKIN' LOVE

A cast-iron classic of Kiss's sexually charged oeuvre, this torrid tale of a marathon all-night 'session' was co-written by Paul Stanley and Sean Delaney (who also helped develop the band's on-stage choreography). Special mention for Ace Frehley, whose guitar playing here is at its most loose and lethal.

33 100,000 YEARS

Gene Simmons: "I read a book called *100,000 Years* where 100,000 years ago we were visited by aliens. Also Einstein's theory of relativity. I was reading all kinds of space and time continuance stuff, and it was all swirling around my head. I showed this stuff to Paul, and he's going: 'What's 100,000 years?' I said: 'Let's just try it.' And then Paul came up with some stuff and I added the riff."

32 NOWHERE TO RUN

It's Kiss's lost classic – a great song pissed away as a makeweight on the stopgap 'best of' album *Killers*. It's powerful and melodic – vintage Paul Stanley – and its thrumming intro echoes The Who's *Pinball Wizard*.

31 HEAVEN'S ON FIRE

Beginning with Paul Stanley yodelling, this is one of the great Kiss songs of the 80s. Assisted by 'hit doctor' buddy

'Well, I looked at him, I kinda laughed, I said…'

Desmond Child, Paul based *Heaven's On Fire* around a huge chanted chorus and created a hair-metal masterpiece.

30 I WANT YOU

Paul Stanley: "I wrote *I Want You* at a soundcheck on stage in England. There was something about being on some of those stages that just felt so magical because my heroes all played on them, and you kind of summon the spirits to enter your body."

29 CALLING DR. LOVE

This Gene Simmons jewel from *Rock And Roll Over* found its inspiration in an unlikely place: the legendary comedy trio The Three Stooges. The infectious *'calling doctor…'* chorus was cribbed from dialogue pulled straight from *Calling All Curs*, a 1939 episode of their TV show.

28 CRAZY CRAZY NIGHTS

The band's biggest hit of the 80s was *Rock And Roll All Nite* with a persecution complex, Paul Stanley proclaiming: *'They try to tell us that we don't belong/But that's alright, we're millions strong.'* It's as daft as it is brilliant.

27 I LOVE IT LOUD

As its title makes abundantly clear, this is the ultimate no-brainer rock anthem. Set to an earth-shaking drum beat, *I Love It Loud* is Gene Simmons's hymn to heavy metal. *'Rock on, I wanna be President!'* he declares, that famous tongue firmly in cheek.

26 CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

In 1982, Kiss delivered the heaviest album of their career in *Creatures Of The Night*. And it was the first song written for the album that became its title track and mission statement: a bombastic, balls-out heavy metal anthem.

25 I STOLE YOUR LOVE

Paul Stanley: "*I Stole Your Love* came quickly. It was kind of like the sister song to *Love Gun*. Swagger and attitude. That song was influenced in some ways by the Deep Purple song *Burn*."

24 ROCK BOTTOM

A rare Stanley/Frehley collaboration, this 1975 classic from *Dressed To Kill* is the perfect example of Kiss's distinctive brand of light-and-shade dynamics, crazy-gluing a delicate soft interlude into locomotive, piledriving rock thunder. The style was further explored ➜

'…Hey man, I am cool, I am the breeze.'

KISS FACTS

29 Peter Criss was overdubbed in *Phantom Of The Park* by actor Michael Bell.

30 Future *Married With Children* star Katie Segal sang on Gene's 1978 solo album.

31 Gene also tried to get John Lennon and Paul McCartney to sing backing vocals…

32 …He ended up using singers from the musical *Beatlemania* instead.

REX FEATURES

TOMMY THAYER

The guitarist reveals all about stepping into Ace Frehley's platform boots and becoming The Spaceman.

Words: **Dave Ling**

When did you first hear Kiss?
I was given their first album for Christmas in 1974. I'd seen photos of them in the rock magazines and my interest was piqued. They were sensational, exactly what every great rock'n'roll band should look like.

After your original band, Black 'N Blue, split, you joined the Kiss organisation in 1994. Gene said your responsibilities were "everything that needed to be done", including painting Paul's house.
I had to make a living. They hired me to be a photo editor but I ended up doing a bit of everything, and I was paid very decently for my efforts. Finally I became the road manager.

That included helping Ace Frehley and Peter Criss regain their match fitness before the 1996 reunion tour.
Yeah, I worked with them both on getting back up to speed. But I wasn't looking to be the new guitarist.

Is it true that you'd once been ready to go on stage for an absent Ace?
Yeah – outfit ready and guitar in hand. And he bowled up at the last second. It was a strange, transitional time.

Would you still describe Ace and Peter as friends of yours?
I don't think so. They were in a more modest state of mind when I helped them prepare for the tour, but their attitudes changed. They saw that I had a certain respect from Gene and Paul, and maybe after a while they resented me. Especially Ace, who knew I was there to take over if necessary. Peter's said some derogatory things about me too. That's the kind of guy he is. He's got a chip on his shoulder.

Was it a forgone conclusion that you'd replace Ace?
Not at all. But a lot of it comes down to personalities. I'd known Paul and Gene for years and we shared a work ethic. It wasn't an easy situation, but I've felt comfortable for the last seven or eight years.

What are Gene and Paul like as bosses?
The way you phrased the question is interesting. Sure, Gene and Paul are the bosses, but it's more of a democratic situation than you'd imagine. Eric [Singer] and I are included in the decision-making process. It is a band.

> **ACE AND PETER RESENTED ME**

Are you allowed to go into their dressing rooms?
In the last few years Paul has broken away because he likes to warm up his voice, but the rest of us use a communal room to apply our make-up – it's part of getting into the role.

What are your thoughts on the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction?
It's well-deserved and a long time coming. As it stands right now, I believe it's just the original four that are being inducted.

So you and Eric Singer would miss out?
Yeah. But the original four started all of this, and you can't ignore that it's a forty-year story. Had Kiss broken up when Peter Criss left in 1980, I'm not too sure that the band would be seen as important as they are now.

Smashes, thrashes and hits: Kiss in their 70s glory.

GETTY

on *I Want You* from 1976's *Rock And Roll Over* album.

23 HARD LUCK WOMAN

A little more country than rock'n'roll – and covered by Garth Brooks – this was allegedly written by Paul Stanley as a possible song for Rod Stewart. Which probably explains why Peter Criss sings it in a raspy style that apes Rod The Mod.

22 GOT TO CHOOSE

Paul Stanley: "There was a band called Boomerang which featured some of the guys from Vanilla Fudge, and they did a version of *Ninety-Nine And A Half (Won't Do)* by Wilson Pickett. I'm pretty sure that's the riff I used in *Got To Choose*. It's one of my favourite Kiss songs."

21 ROCKET RIDE

Always a loose cannon, Ace Frehley appeared on only one of five studio tracks included on *Alive II*, but on that one track, *Rocket Ride*, he was smoking. Written and sung by Ace, it's heavy and trippy… like Kiss on drugs.

20 FIREHOUSE

This song was preceded by *Hotter Than Hell* at live gigs, and sung by Paul Stanley while sporting a Kiss logo-embossed fireman's helmet. One of Kiss's earliest songs, it was written by Stanley after hearing The Move's *Fire Brigade*.

19 GOIN' BLIND

Only Simmons would sing a love song as creepy as *Goin' Blind*, in which a 93-year-old man lusts after a girl of 16. Written in 1970 – as *Little Lady* – for pre-Kiss group Wicked Lester, it was recorded by Kiss in 1974.

18 NOTHIN' TO LOSE

Gene Simmons: "*Nothin' To Lose* came to me after hearing the line in two different songs. One was a Little Richard song, and another was a song called *Sea Cruise*, which had the line, *'You got nothin' to lose, won't you let me take you on a sea cruise.'*"

17 I WAS MADE FOR LOVIN' YOU

Co-written with Desmond Child, and regarded by many as a sell-out when it was released in 1979, this pulsing disco workout has nevertheless stood the test of time and still features in Kiss's live shows.

16 LICK IT UP

When Kiss took off the make-up in 1983, they needed a great song to prove they could cut it on music alone. *Lick It Up* was exactly that. With its irresistible chugging riff and shout-it-out-loud chorus, this was classic Kiss.

15 C'MON AND LOVE ME

Paul Stanley's role as the sex symbol of Kiss was played out to the max on this frisky track from 1975, on which he begs to be dominated. *'Take me down to my knees,'* he pants. *'You can do what you please.'*

14 PARASITE

An Ace Frehley song for 1974's *Hotter Than Hell*. The Space Ace was asked to perform lead vocals but declined on the grounds of not feeling confident in his singing skills. Anchored by a nasty guitar riff that pre-dated Aerosmith's *Walk This Way*, it was a powerhouse standard in the band's mid-70s set.

13 BLACK DIAMOND

Paul Stanley: "*Black Diamond* was a song that I wrote about New York. New York was very dear to us, and life there was all we could write about. Seeing hookers on the street, whether we lived it, we saw it and it kind of gave us something to fantasise about."

12 HOTTER THAN HELL

The sonic sibling to *Firehouse*, and inspired

KISS FACTS

33 Rick James holds Gene's Kramer 'Axe' bass on the cover of 1982's *Throwin' Down*.

34 Paul Stanley's solo acting debut was in 1982's *Young Doctors In Love*. He was edited out.

35 Richie Sambora and Angel's Punky Meadows both tried out for Ace Frehley's job.

36 Ace's eventual replacement Vinnie Vincent was a staff songwriter on *Happy Days*.

by Free's *All Right Now*, this is a stomping paean to a good-looking – though, sadly, married – girl *'all dressed in satins and lace'*. No need to fire up the barbecue either, because *'she's gonna leave you well done'*.

11 SHOUT IT OUT LOUD

Released as the lead single off 1977's *Destroyer*. The title was inspired by The Hollies' song *I Wanna Shout* (covered by pre-Kiss band Wicked Lester). Bob Ezrin's giant-sized production helped turn a deceptively simple ditty into a stadium-filling monster.

10 SHOCK ME

On the band's sixth studio album, *Love Gun*, Ace Frehley finally cut his first lead vocal. He'd written *Shock Me* after being electrocuted on stage, and sang it in the nonchalant manner of Keith Richards. He was one cool motherfucker.

9 LOVE GUN

Paul Stanley – who as well as singing it also played bass on *Love Gun* – once described this loaded 'n' lascivious track as "quintessential Kiss and probably one of the five essential signature songs". But is he talking about a Glock, or his cock? Discuss.

8 GOD OF THUNDER

Producer Bob Ezrin demanded that Gene sing this song, and not Paul, who wrote it. It was a brilliant call. The most epic of all Kiss songs, *God Of Thunder* defined Simmons's OTT persona and became his calling card.

7 BETH

A twinkling piano ballad sung by Peter Criss, this used to provide a useful breather amid the blood and thunder of Kiss's live shows. The Kitty Kat would clamber down from his riser and, with tears streaking his whiskers, chuck roses into the audience. Strange to think it was originally titled *Beck*, after a girl named Rebecca.

6 DO YOU LOVE ME?

Written by Paul Stanley with Bob Ezrin, producer of *Destroyer*, and Kim Fowley, mysterious Svengali to teen-girl rock group The Runaways, this provocatively titled and sexually charged track is a potent combination of rock-star vanity and groupie fantasy.

5 STRUTTER

Paul Stanley: "*Strutter* was written when the band was a trio. Lyrically it was my ongoing fascination with women in the New York glitter scene. I was a middle-class kid from the suburbs who was suddenly thrown into this rock world that was taking place in New York."

4 COLD GIN

This classic drinking song was written by piss artist Ace Frehley but sung by teetotaller Gene Simmons because Ace wasn't confident enough to sing lead back in '74. Forty years on, *Cold Gin* is still the most kick-ass Kiss track.

3 ROCK AND ROLL ALL NITE

In 1974, Kiss were told by record company boss Neil Bogart: "You guys need an anthem." The result was an American classic: *Rock And Roll All Nite*. The live version was their breakthrough hit. It remains the definitive Kiss song.

2 DEUCE

Gene Simmons: "*Deuce* was written in my head on a bus. I heard the lick, the riff, the melody, the whole thing. We arranged it right on the spot and knew that it would be a staple for years."

GETTY

1 DETROIT ROCK CITY

It was a close call, but you voted this timeless ode to the power of rock'n'roll the greatest ever Kiss song. It was in Detroit, not their home town of New York, that Kiss found their biggest audience in their early days. In return, the band gave the Motor City its own rock anthem. No Kiss show is complete without it.

Paul Stanley: "On a previous tour somebody had gotten hit by a car and killed outside the arena. I remember thinking how weird it is that people can be on their way to something that's really a party and a celebration of being alive, and die in the process of doing it. So that became the basis of the lyric."

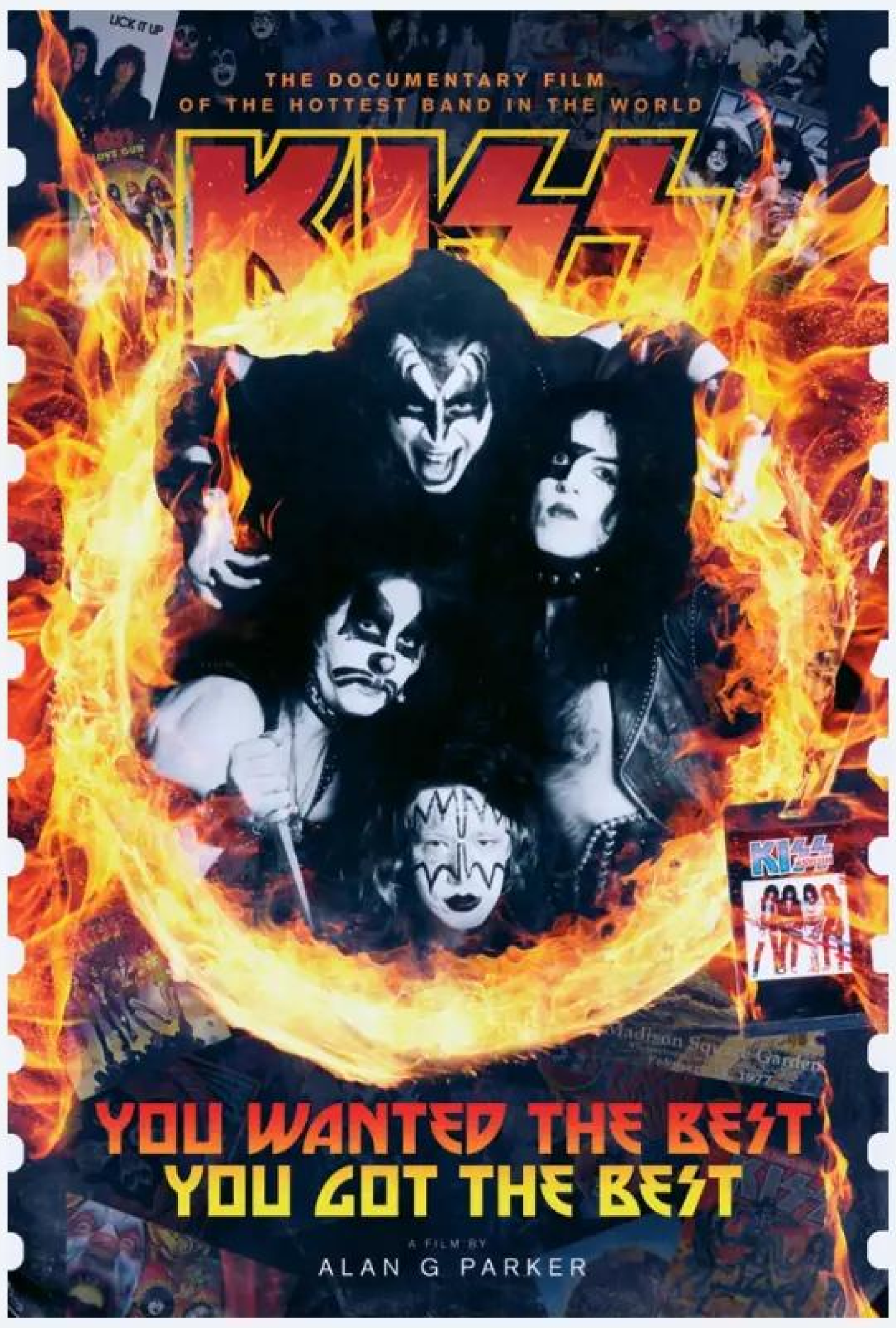
KISS FACTS

37 Paul Stanley was in the running to produce Guns N' Roses' *Appetite For Destruction*.

38 Drummer Eric Carr played bass on two songs: *Little Caesar* and *I Still Love You*.

39 In 2001, Paul Stanley lent his voice to a commercial for Folgers Coffee.

40 Aerosmith's Joe Perry is the only muso to jam live with Kiss (on *Strutter* in 2004).



IT CERTAINLY WON'T BE SUGAR-COATED

Finally, Kiss get the big-screen outing they deserve.

From 1978 TV film *Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park* to Gene Simmons's appearance as a villain in the dodgy 1984 sci-fi movie *Runaway*, Kiss have always had an unsteady relationship with the big screen. But all that should change with a new documentary currently in production.

The band have teamed up with director Alan G Parker for *You Wanted The Best, You Got The Best…*, a career-spanning, warts'n'all look at the band's 40-plus-year history set for release in the autumn. Parker already has form when it comes to doing rock films, having directed the recent Status Quo documentary *Hello Quo*.

"We wanted to find someone with an honest voice, because what you're doing is placing your child into someone else's hands," Gene Simmons says of the film. "Alan not only has a Kiss tattoo on his body, he also has an authentic vibe about him. His approach was that the movie had to include everything, and not just what Paul and Gene wanted. It certainly won't be sugar-coated. We will not interfere at all."

Parkers promises "all forty years told in two hours and twenty minutes", complete with unseen footage of the band from their heyday.

The project hasn't been without its controversies – Ace Frehley and Peter Criss both refused to take part – but the director and the band insist it will be an unvarnished look at the band, with no meddling from Kiss themselves.

"Absolutely," says Simmons. "We don't get the right to edit anything. He has the freedom to present us the way he sees fit, and if that makes us look like capitalist pigs then so be it. It's exactly what I am." **DE**

'…well that's alright, we're millions strong.'

To celebrate *Classic Rock*'s landmark 200th issue in 2015, the magazine spoke to Paul and Gene about the band's enormous legacy. This is what they told us...

Words: **Mark Blake** Pictures: **Neil Zlozower**

From the Classic Rock Archive 2015

PAUL STANLEY

***Y**ou've just published your autobiography,* **Face The Music.** *Is this your way of addressing the Kiss legacy?*

Gene, Ace and Peter have all written theirs. But I didn't want to write the fourth Kiss book, but the first Paul Stanley book. Kiss is central to a lot of things in my life, but not all of it.

How do Gene's and the others' take on the legacy differ from yours?

I have to say I didn't read all of their books. Gene is a classic only child, so over the years his perception of reality has become skewed. I took exception to some things in his book [*Kiss And Make-Up*]. The few bits people showed me from Ace's [*No Regrets*] and Peter's [*Makeup To Break-Up*] confirmed my worst thoughts. There's a reason lawyers don't put alcoholics and drug addicts on the stand. How can they write their memoirs when they can barely remember what happened?

There's a line in your book that says you spent years "chasing approval, chasing acknowledgement and chasing love".

It's true. So many entertainers are seeking that. We're all addicted to this unrealistic need for mass adulation.

What did you learn about Kiss from writing your life story?

I realised how hard we worked not to show our weaknesses and flaws. We created an image built around being superhuman, perfect people that could take all the pot shots and negativity and wouldn't flinch. The trouble is the perception became the reality.

Is there an aspect of the band that always gets overlooked?

The simplicity of what we were doing couldn't help but be overshadowed by the huge image. I never aspired to that image, though. My roots were going to see all these fabulous bands – The Move, Led Zeppelin playing to less than two thousand people – and being inspired by that.

So inside Kiss there's always been a classic English rock band trying to get out?

Yes. It's no coincidence that most of the bands I grew up on were British. That's the foundation of Kiss.

Kiss have always presented themselves as superhuman, but did you envy other bands and think: "I want Kiss to be like that"?

Absolutely. I don't know if I'd call it envy, though. That might be too negative.

You're very hard on the music Kiss made in the 80s.

I know. Those albums sold very well but, looking back, the problem is we weren't leading any more. We were following.

Did you regret taking off the make-up back then?

I can't say I have regrets. Everything led to the next thing. We'd taken off the make-up for all the right reasons but hadn't found an equal replacement. And never would.

Would it be fair to say that your family is the thing you're proudest of these days?

Totally. What I have now with my family is more than I ever thought I could have.

What does Paul Stanley know in 2014 that he didn't in 1974?

That strength doesn't come from not flinching, but from being able to show your weaknesses and your flaws.

Is there anything you'd have done differently then?

I'd have not worn some of those clothes.

It could have been worse. You could have been wearing Gene's clothes.

Absolutely. Whenever I feel bad about the eighties I can look at pictures of Gene.

Here's Gene Simmons talking about the legacy of Kiss in 2008: "Legacy don't matter to me. I get paid hideously well because I am one of the four guys in Kiss. Once you've paid me well, it really doesn't matter."**

Ha! Look, I say those kind of things because you guys need something to quote.

So have you changed your mind?

The God's honest truth is, I consider this a privilege. I am blessed. I take what we do seriously, but not *too* seriously. But if I didn't exist it wouldn't affect humanity.

You initially resisted the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame's request that the original members of Kiss be inducted. It's a shame there's still so much bad blood there.

For some reason I am still a dark cloud over the heads of Ace and Peter decades after they left the band, because it's easier to blame someone else for where you've ended up in life rather than blame yourself. Ace, bless him, is one of the nicest, sweetest guys when he's straight, but when he's high he's Jekyll and Hyde.

If you could go back to 1974/75 in Kiss's career what would you do differently?

We should have fired those guys at the first signs of drugs and showing up late in the studio, and forcing us to use a different guitar player to do the solos.

You've never been comfortable with excesses of rock'n'roll, have you?

No. Instead I point to some of the most iconic figures. Elvis: Dead, fat, bloated, pathetic, naked on the floor in Las Vegas [*it was Memphis - Geography Ed*]. And all those people who died at twenty seven: Cobain, Hendrix, Mama Cass, Morrison.

Is there an aspect of Kiss that always gets overlooked?

Quite honestly, if there is it's not an issue for me. I'm not hung up on the artistry. I'm hung up on having a great time at whatever level.

Any regrets?

Yes. I could have picked an easier band to be in. Every night, I have to put on eight-inch platforms, fifty-five pounds of armour, sweat my balls off, spit fire and run the risk of burning my mouth or swallowing kerosene.

What do Kiss do that no else can?

The truth is there are bands who play better, and many who play worse. But there is something that happens on stage with us that is different from other bands. Stand next to us, and you cannot win.

What's the biggest mistake Kiss made?

The eighties was a dishonest decade. We started Kiss as the band we wanted to see on stage, and then we became like every other band we saw on stage. But at the time, we looked in the mirror and thought we looked cool. We swallowed the whole thing hook, line and sinker – which sounds like a bad Nazareth album title.

Is there anything left for Kiss to achieve?

Yes. I'm looking forward to when the Stones or U2 have the balls to get on stage with us. I say that with deep, humbling respect. But if you're the champions, you've got to invite all-comers to get into the ring.

How would Gene Simmons like to be remembered?

Rock'n'roll is full of lemmings. They all follow the first one, and as soon as they get to the edge of the cliff the first one jumps and they all jump. I see myself as the one at the back of the line going: "Fuck this!

GENE SIMMONS

Who Is The Real Paul Stanley?

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2017

On stage he's the sex-crazed Starchild, the critic-baiting rock god, the Kiss icon who rock'n'rolls all night and parties every day. Off stage he's a home-builder, chef, cardio fan and family man, who hides a birth defect but has finally grown to accept himself.

Words: **Jaan Uhelszki** Portraits: **Ross Halfin**

You know you're getting close to Paul Stanley's house when your ears start to pop. That, of course, has nothing to do with the bombastic Kiss frontman's piercing falsetto that has helped the band sell more than 100 million albums over the past four and a half decades. It's because Stanley lives high up the treeline in the Santa Monica Mountains, in a villa that he's fond of calling "the house that bad reviews built".

And he's right. Plenty of fans love Kiss, but critics don't, bashing them ever since the band first hobbled out of their New York loft in 1973, wearing five-inch platforms, black fetish wear and greasy make-up, to begin their conquest of the restless hearts of suburban teens. For most fans, Kiss were always more than just a band. They were a state of mind, a place where feeling alienated was venerated, where boys were men, girls were groupies and nobody ever had to turn down the volume.

For their critics they were an irritant. They could never quite figure out why four (mostly) intelligent and somewhat erudite guys deliberately played dumb with their comic-book theatrics, musical simplicity and promise to *'rock'n'roll all night and party every day'*.

While Kiss embodied every single thing rock'n'roll was supposed to be, they were actively, albeit unofficially, barred from being inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, kept out until 15 years after their eligibility. Bestselling author and *Creem* magazine co-founder Dave Marsh, a member of the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame nominating committee, huffed in 2011: "Kiss will never be a great band, and I have done my share to keep them off the ballot."

Fortunately they had supporters such as Rage Against The Machine's Tom Morello, who called himself "a noisy, fist-pounding advocate for years for Kiss to be in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame".

People listened, because in 2014, the band were inducted by Morello himself. Morello isn't the only modern-day musician who claims he owes his career inspiration to Kiss, though. Garth Brooks has famously said that Kiss were his Beatles, while Dave Grohl has been a diehard fan for 40 years.

"These days I spend every morning before school with Paul Stanley in the parking lot of our kids' fuckin' elementary school," Grohl revealed a while back. He confessed that the two talk about Zeppelin, *Electric Ladyland*, the rigours of touring and, of course, school fundraisers – like the one the Foo Fighters put together last October, and got Stanley on stage for a version of Zep's *Whole Lotta Love* and the Stones' *It's Only Rock'n'Roll (But I Like It)*.

Back to Stanley's house, which was once owned by raunchy American comic Redd Foxx. Stanley spotted it around the time the members of Kiss put their differences aside, slapped the make-up back on and reunited for the Alive/Worldwide Tour in 1996, their first with all the original members since 1979's *Dynasty* go-round. That 1996 tour, which no one ▷

thought would ever happen, grossed a whopping $143.7 million, their largest payday to date, and was the top-grossing rock tour that year.

With his part of the take from the 13-month tour, Paul Stanley purchased a Big Dipper-shaped slice of property, razed Foxx's white stucco Mediterranean-style digs and began constructing his dream home, based on country houses he'd loved when he was in Italy.

By the time the landscape artists were planting the first cypress trees on the property, the Italian tiles were being laid around the turquoise swimming pool and the frescos were painted in the dining room, and a fan in Cincinnati, Ohio, threw his prosthetic leg on stage at a Kiss concert in the Riverside Stadium. (Without batting a kohl-rimmed eye, the band members signed the faux limb and threw it back to him.) When Kiss got to the Rainbow Theatre in London for the reunion tour's final show – where Stanley burned his guitar before smashing it, a gesture full of meaning and ire – the rose bushes were being planted and the water was turned on in the fountains.

Now, 21 years later, Paul Stanley is comfortable as lord of the manor in his Tuscan dream. While baronial in scope and interior decoration, the 9,000-square-foot home has a rather cosy, lived-in look. Unlike many other rock icons, such as Rod Stewart and Tom Petty, whose palatial homes resemble the hushed hotel lobbies they've spent many of their better days in, Stanley's house looks like the way his 19-year-old self might have imagined a rock star's house should look, with huge wrought-iron candle holders, with tapers as thick as an elephant's ankle; large, overstuffed

Erin was just a godsend. I always say if I need proof of God, it was meeting her."

furniture that can completely swallow you; chairs fit for a Tudor king; a marble fireplace tall enough to roast an entire boar in it; not to mention the leopard-spot carpeting (like the finish on the BC Rich custom guitar Stanley used on the *Animalize* tour) that covers an entire room. Pride of place goes to the Tiffany lamp he bought in 1978 for $70,000 after his blush of real success.

"I had just bought my first apartment in New York. I literally had no furniture, but I had that lamp and I thought I was the luckiest guy in the world – but now I know I am," he says, sweeping an arm that seems to encompass the whole house, the grounds, maybe the entire universe.

The house is located in one of the most geographically desirable areas in this geographically desirable city. If you squint and look beyond the column-lined loggia you can see the Pacific Ocean. Look the other way and you can see the not-so-gentle S-curves of Mulholland Drive, where Hollywood thrill-seekers Steve McQueen and James Dean regularly careered around the two-lane highway's legendary hairpin turns, sometimes with near-disastrous results.

The strip of road that Stanley calls home has been known as Bad Boy Drive for the past 30 years or so, thanks to the debauchery and sheer wantonness of a trio of hellraising stars: Marlon Brando, Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty during his bachelor days. If this were two decades ago, the name would fit Stanley to a T. Old girlfriends still talk about his lack of fidelity. But then it wasn't something he has ever tried to hide. For most of Kiss's glory years there was a constant parade of *Penthouse* pets and *Playboy* centrefolds who scampered through his life and his bed.

"I remember I was with my mom and I was telling her a story about a girl I was going out with," reminisces Stanley, sitting on the edge of one of his fawn-coloured velvet couches in his family room. "She didn't seem to know who I was talking about, so I said: 'You know," so and so. 'She's blonde and has big boobs.' She looked at me and said: 'All your girlfriends are blonde and have big boobs.'

"I used to enjoy just pushing my parents' buttons to let them know I'm living a life they would be aghast at," he says laughing, "but apparently it stopped working."

However, since meeting his second wife, Erin Sutton, at Ago's, a fancy West Hollywood restaurant co-owned by Robert De Niro, Stanley stopped his womanising ways. The couple married in 2005 and have three children together. "Erin was just a godsend. I always say if I need proof of God, it was meeting her."

As if on cue, Erin, 20 years his junior, walks

Happy families with wife Erin and son Evan.

GETTY x3

Back for a big one: Kiss face the press for their mammoth 1996 tour.

into the sitting room, having just picked up their youngest child, five-year-old Emily Grace, from school. (Stanley's brood also includes 22-year-old Evan, with his first wife Pam Bowen, 10-year-old Colin and eight-year-old Sarah.)

The couple usually go to together the same cardio barre exercise class, a punishing session where he's often the only man. Stanley posted a couple of selfies of himself splayed out on a yoga mat: "Been doing cardio workouts with Erin in a class of women. Ego makes me push on. JEEZ! Why am I sweating like this?" Another Instagram groused: "10:30am exercise class is over. On the floor. Conclusion?? The waiting is NOT the hardest part. @tompetty #exercise."

The first thing that strikes you about Paul Stanley is how thin he is. "Rock'n'roll is never kind to the fat boy," he told me more than 20 years ago. At 65 he's amended the credo a little, telling me: "No one wants to see a fat rock star in tights."

Maybe not in any kind of leisurewear. On this cold and drizzling winter morning, he's wearing black Levi's 511s, a black V-neck T-shirt and patent leather dress shoes, and around his neck an atavistic silver charm that looks to have primitive talismanic power. "Is it from Chrome Hearts?" I ask, citing a status jewellery line, a favourite of celebs including Steven Tyler, Lenny Kravitz, Cher and Chanel head Karl Lagerfeld. "No!" he says aghast. "If you buy Chrome Hearts it means you're making too much money."

Stanley is rather circumspect – and careful – about his wealth. Unless he's at a charity event or an awards show where he's wearing Brioni or Varvatos, he dresses down in jeans, T-shirts and trainers – always with black soles. He does his own grocery shopping at the nearby Ralph's, by no means a high-end supermarket, driving himself in an understated black SUV. There are photos of him in a beanie and a T-shirt, holding a Starbuck's coffee in one hand and giving the photographer the finger with the other.

> "I used to enjoy just pushing my parents' buttons to let them know I'm living a life they would be aghast at."

Despite the veneer of civility, the perfect teeth and the expensive sculpted haircut, there's still much of the guy from Queens who wanted to be a rock star, like countless other pre-teens when they saw The Beatles on television for the first time. Stanley just happened to be one of the few who managed to pull it off, galvanised by the idea of success as a panacea to the self-worth issues he felt as a child. These were due largely to a birth defect called microtia. His right ear was misshapen and he was partially deaf on his right side, unable to determine the direction of sounds in his school classroom. He sank into a pit of despair and suffered constant taunting. While scoring high in IQ tests, he wasn't able to hear what his teachers were saying so consequently did poorly in school. Called 'Stanley, the one-eared monster' by his classmates, he kept to himself and had few friends.

"It wasn't like putting on a shirt you didn't like and then going home to change," he says. "I couldn't go home and change this. I just had to live with it."

Or at least until The Beatles and The Byrds came along, and a change in fashion that allowed men to wear their hair long.

For years, no one knew. Not even his bandmates in Kiss. "I think we can't reveal our secrets until we're comfortable enough to," he says. "When you are, then the ultimate freedom comes from freeing yourself from the things that you hide."

Stanley was halfway through his first run as the Phantom Of The Opera in 1999 when an audience member got in touch with him. She worked for an organisation in Canada called AboutFace that helped children with facial differences cope. Without knowing it, she intuited that the phantom was more than just a role for Stanley. After the two met, he admitted that he had a traumatising facial deformity, and by the end of their meeting had agreed to become a celebrity spokesperson for the organisation. He now helps raise funds for them and visits schools to speak to would-be bullies and detractors about classmates who might be similarly handicapped. And it was by doing this that his healing and self-acceptance really began.

"That's when I realised the phantom was me," he says earnestly. "That I was born to play it. It was a story of a scarred, deformed musician who hid behind a mask. I didn't even realise that was why I was so drawn to the part, and when I did. It was a massive turning point for me. Everything in my life changed after that for the better."

But with Paul Stanley, you can never tell. He's rather parsimonious when doling out information, playing things close to the perfectly tailored vests he likes to wear. It wouldn't be incorrect to say he's still wearing a mask, just that now it's invisible. He's careful, appropriate, soft-spoken and ▷

Paul Stanley, at home. Shot exclusively for *Classic Rock*, March 8, 2017.

GETTY

> “For as long as you’re on stage it’s magical. But the disparity between being on stage and off stage, that’s where the problem comes in.”

articulate, polite and warm. Approaching friendly, but not quite getting there.

For him an interview is another performance. But then maybe it always was, and I was too blinded by being a private in the Kiss Army to notice; too paralysed by nerves the time I joined the band on stage for my breakout story, *I Dreamed I Was Onstage With KISS In My Maidenform Bra*. And, after all, it was Stanley who showed me how to hold my red guitar “low and sexy”.

My mind keeps screaming: ‘Where is that guy who used to whip up his audiences into an orgiastic frenzy, teasing and taunting, demanding that they say “rock’n’roll” like their life depended on rock’n’roll, when it was clear that his did?’ Then, dangling his lean, leather-booted legs over the lip of the stage, just out of reach of the grasping crowd, wiggling his ass and dancing away right out of their clutches. He later explained: “The reason I’ll throw myself at the audience is to see if they’ll take me.”

Now he knows they will. And that changed something in him. On stage he’s effusive and inappropriate. In his exaggerated New York accent, pitched way above his normal speaking voice, he asks, as a lifelong teetotaller: “How many of you people like to get high?” while stretching out the last syllable until it becomes a screech. Or prodding: “How many of you girls like to get licked?” Or emitting a huge scream, followed by: “I’ve got a feelin’, people! If y’all loosen up just a little bit we’re gonna get this place so hot we’re gonna have to call out… the *Firehouse*!”

Off stage he’s anything but that character. This is another guy. Sincere. Serious – very serious. Was it the make-up that gave him licence to become Jekyll to his own Hyde?

“No,” he replies firmly. “The years that we were out of make-up [1983-1996] were fine for me. I found them very satisfying because I got a chance to be out there without make-up, which I craved at that point.

“I think it was easier for me because my persona was one that wasn’t really defined by the make-up – it was embellished,” he explains, emphasising the last word. “To me, the make-up was just reinforcing what you were seeing and who I was. But the day we put the make-up back on before the reunion tour was magical. To look in the mirror and see that face again was empowering.”

Would it be fair to say you’ve integrated the Starchild and Paul Stanley?

“Totally,” he says, nodding his head.

But they were separate for a long time.

“Very much so. That’s why there are still bands and there are still performers who don’t want to go home, because they don’t have a home and because they need that mass adulation.”

But what about you? The Starchild needs the attention, but Paul Stanley doesn’t any more?

“That’s not really what I meant,” he replies stiffly, getting up to straighten one of the floor-to-ceiling drapes. “To a point it’s easier to live with the attention you get from being on stage all the time than to get your shit together and get your life in order. But if you do get your life in order, everything is enhanced.

“For as long as you’re on stage, it’s magical. But the disparity between being on stage and off stage, that’s where the problem comes in. So I see some other bands and I know why they’re out on tour – because they can’t stand being home. It’s much nicer to use one to enhance the other.”

These days, Stanley doesn’t feel the need to tour as much. When he does, he makes sure he can take his brood, save for Evan, who lives in New York where he heads up his own band, The Dives. After the debacle of Kiss’s 2000 Farewell Tour with the original members, Stanley says there’s a slim-to-none chance that they will ever again re-form the band with the ▷

Sofa so good: one of the many rooms in the house that 100 million album sales and years of megabucks-grossing tours built.

original line-up, despite the fact that last year he collaborated with former bandmate Ace Frehley in a video for a cover of Free's *Fire And Water,* a track from guitarist Ace's covers album *Origins Vol. 1*.

At the end of the second reunion tour in 2002, Stanley and Gene Simmons really intended to pull the plug on the band, until (and yes, the reason does sound somewhat unbelievable) an attendant at a car wash that Stanley frequents near his home told him they shouldn't do it, and that maybe they should instead just consider it a farewell to Peter Criss and Ace Frehley. "I took that as a sign and that's exactly what we did."

Stanley also seems to be getting along better with Simmons now. He's stopped saying things like: "Gene lives close by. His ego is so big I can see it from here." Now his comments are much milder.

Stanley and Gene Simmons: now getting along better than at times in the past.

GETTY

"Gene's my brother. He lives right down the street. And we like each other so much that we stay out of each other's way. As sickening as it might sound, we're not beyond sending each other texts of appreciation. We both have the lives that perhaps we didn't intend to in the beginning, but we both made it possible for us to reach the lives that make us happy. If you would have told him thirty, forty years ago where he'd wind up, he couldn't comprehend it. But you have to keep moving forward. And you may find your destination is not where you intended."

Stanley's home is noticeably devoid of Kiss memorabilia, except for a Kiss pinball machine pushed against the far corner of the room. "We all play it. It's awesome. I wouldn't want any of that other stuff in the house, but this… I know who I am, what I've done. I don't need to keep reminding myself."

There are few other accoutrements of life as the lead singer of what was the number-one rock band in the world in 1977, according to a Gallup poll. Perched on an antique wooden occasional table are framed photos of Stanley, his family, Paul McCartney, and one of Stanley with Jimmy Page, his true musical hero, then as now; when his iPhone rings, the unmistakable first four notes of Led Zeppelin's *Good Times Bad Times* slice through the deep silence of the room.

"Did you hear that?" he asks.

In Stanley's entryway is an abstract painting titled *Crossroads* that he painted himself. It's stunningly good, and reminds one of Picasso's African period, if the Spanish artist had used more primary colours instead of earth tones. "I painted one for Jimmy and it hangs in his entryway too," Stanley says proudly.

We continue a short tour of the rest of his home. His patent leather shoes make a squeaking sound as he crosses from the carpet to hardwood floors, their glossy mirror finish trapping flecks of the early afternoon light. He catches me looking at them and says, a little defensively: "What? I like patent leather." It's a small, humanising moment.

Squeak, squeak, squeak, squeak. We move from the family room into a more formal living room with a gleaming black grand piano.

"Do you…" I begin to ask.

"No, I don't know how to play," he replies, anticipating my question and besting me in what's beginning to feel like fast ping-pong, rather than a true interview.

We follow the natural curve of the house into a large dining room lit by a crystal chandelier, with a mural that Michelangelo could have painted – airy and celestial, with cherubs and clouds floating beatifically on a lemon-yellow background. On a massive formal dining room table that seems lifted from *Game Of Thrones* are the remains of a Monopoly game set up for two players, with no clear winner. A fitting game for the children of a man who is worth more than $200 million.

"No, no, my children aren't spoiled," Stanley counters. "Evan sold vegetables at a roadside stand and was a delivery boy for a deli. I had a conversation once with a very successful doctor

Pizza the action: Stanley at one of his Rock & Brews restaurants and (right) displaying something from the menu.

and he asked me: 'How do we get our children to have the thirst and the desire to succeed when they already have everything?' I told him you can't replicate your childhood. You can't replicate your life, because it would be artificial. It's like when your grandfather would say: 'When I was your age I didn't have shoes to go to school.' Well, I have shoes. I didn't grow up in a house like this – I was a cab driver – but it doesn't mean that my children can't have the values that will have them aspire to their own successes."

Squeak, squeak, squeak, squeak…

As we move through the house, the high-ceilinged rooms spill into one another. There are no doors or divisions between them, it's one lovely, sprawling space, ending at a bright, spacious kitchen with a restaurant-quality range. Pots and pans are stacked haphazardly in the cupboards. Drawers are a little ajar, there's a pile of used plastic Ziploc bags in a corner of the counters, and a carved wooden highboy is stacked with papers.

The items are actually recognisable from the photos of meals that Stanley makes and posts on his Twitter account. Last autumn he posted: "Just winging dinner. No pun intended! Made Chicken Piccata but don't know how." Then: "No sauce? NO PROBLEM! Check out my pizza with olive oil, cherry tomatoes, parmigiana and rosemary. AWESOME!! @FoodNetwork @FoodChannel."

In fact Stanley is a gourmet-standard chef, who cooks up prosciutto Brussels sprouts and chicken marinade on the Hallmark Channel, giving shout-outs on Twitter to Food Network chefs Scott Conant or Alex Guarnaschelli, or giving cooking demonstrations on Kiss Kruises.

"I've been cooking since I became a single dad [in 2001, after his divorce from actress Pam Bowen]," he says. "I'm pretty good at it. I'm good at Italian food and have a pizza oven outside."

So good that there are videos of him stretching a disc of dough twice the size of his head, spinning it and tossing it four feet in the air. "My fingers have been everywhere," he says, leering at the camera, "and they gave pleasure to a lot of people."

It's a reminder that if Kiss were superheroes, his special talent was the power of sex. Preening and strutting for audiences for the past 44 years – a shoulder drop here, a nipple pinch there – he was the Marilyn Monroe of rock frontmen.

But since 2012 there's been more steak than sex sizzle in that mix. Or at least hamburger. Stanley and Gene Simmons became co-owners of Rock & Brews, a family-friendly restaurant chain that is a combination of sports bar, brew pub and concert hall, each boasting a Great Wall Of Rock bearing iconic rock art, and flatscreen televisions that continually stream some of rock's greatest moments – Kiss concerts included.

Currently with 18 locations, from Hawaii to Mexico, there are plans to develop a destination casino and resort in Braman, Oklahoma, in partnership with American Indian tribe the Kaw Nation. At each of the openings, Stanley demonstrates his cooking acumen, making a pizza on the fly, all the while giving cooking tips.

So what's your best tip?

"Cooking tip?" He looks flummoxed, taking a long minute to consider. "Oh my gosh. Balancing flavours. That applies to art. That applies to music. I'm a monkey at a typewriter when I'm cooking, but if you just keep tasting, you figure out where your balance is. The way you do anything is the way you do everything," he says seriously.

> "It's so easy to please other people, but you go home every night and you're the one who has to live with yourself. So compliments and attention are pretty hollow."

There is a side of Paul Stanley that comes across like a motivational speaker. Okay, a big side. Perhaps much of that has come from overcoming his own demons – and that doesn't mean Simmons, although there certainly were some intra-band dynamics that Stanley has dealt with over their 47-year-long partnership. Kiss were well into their twentieth year – and Stanley into almost the thirtieth year of his intermittent psychotherapy (that began when he was just 16) – before he really dealt with some of his self-esteem issues. He grew up in a household where his parents weren't particularly effusive or affectionate, with an elder sister who clearly had emotional problems and developed some issues with drugs. But Stanley had to deal with something more tangible: that microtia condition.

"My struggle has always been to be the best me. So I've always been hard on myself. And maybe that's the best way to accomplish what's important to you. Because it's so easy to please other people, but you go home every night and you're the one who has to live with yourself. So compliments and attention are pretty hollow, and it only lasts as long as the person's talking to you. My quest was always something different. And it wasn't something that I needed to tell people. It was ongoing every day."

But is the guy who started Kiss the same guy who answered the door today?

"Yeah. The heart's always been the same. Growing up the way I did, I think I reached a point where I realised that who I patterned myself on, my parents, was a dead end that was only going to lead to my own demise in one way or another. So I had to go back to square one and learn… virtually I've had to learn to walk again, because I didn't learn in a healthy way. So that was my struggle.

"I don't say that for sympathy. We all have challenges, and maybe what people have responded to in my book [Stanley's autobiography *Face The Music: A Life Exposed*] is realising that they're not that different than I am. And I realised I wasn't that different than them. Especially in the make-up."

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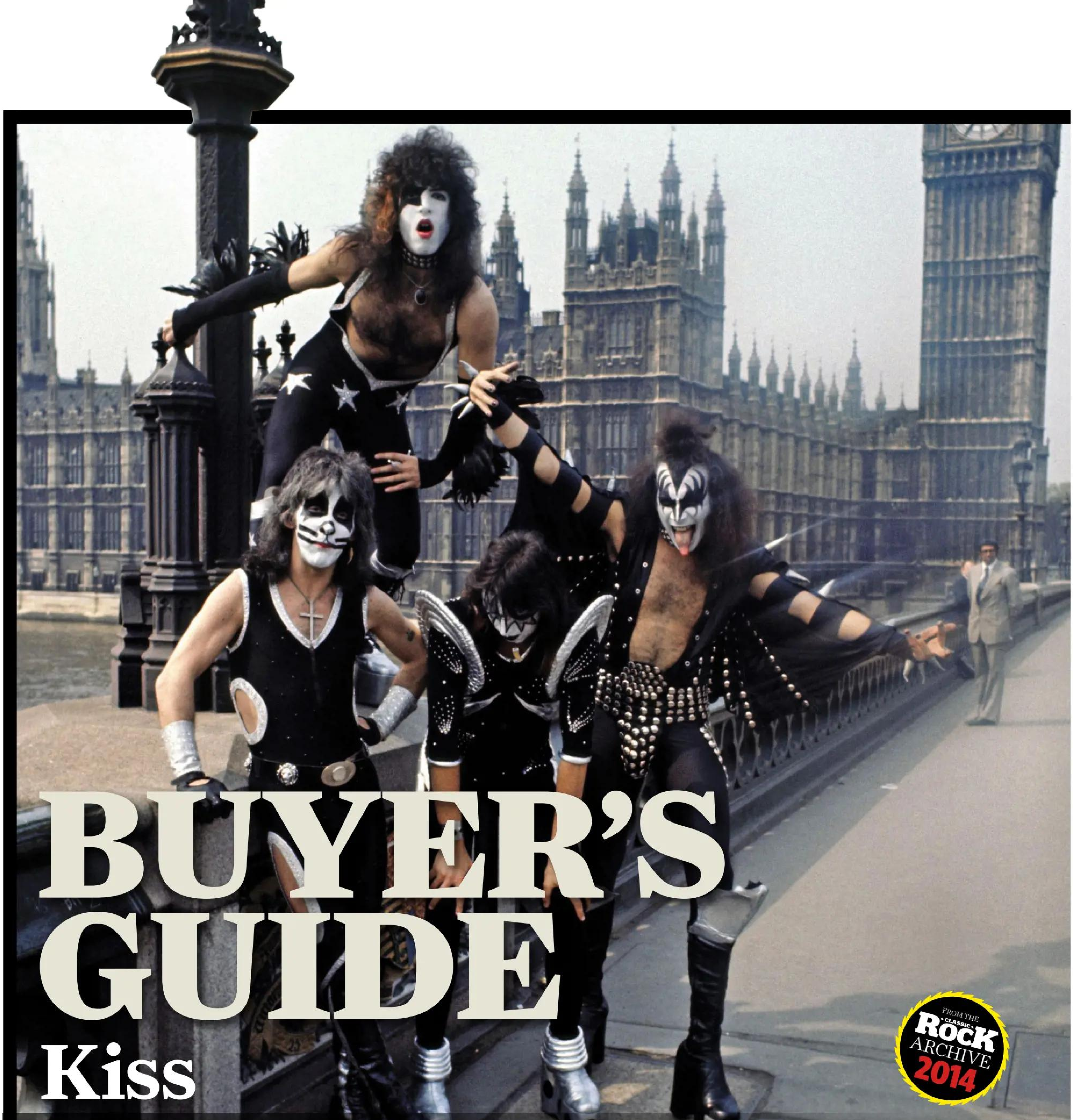


BUYER'S GUIDE

Kiss

Look beyond the heels and make-up and you'll find a band with a magic touch for writing classic anthems. Over 40 years, Kiss have sold 100 million records and created some of the finest rock albums of all time.

They were not the first rock'n'roll band with a strong visual identity: The Beatles had their mop-tops and dandyish suits. They were not the trailblazers in rock theatre: Bowie and Alice Cooper went before them. But if there is one band that has understood and exploited the power of image in rock'n'roll, and the importance of putting on a show, it's Kiss.

With painted faces, outlandish costumes and seven-inch stack-heeled boots, Kiss arrived in the 70s like superheroes straight out of a comic. They had superhero names: rhythm guitarist/lead vocalist Paul Stanley was The Starchild; bassist Gene Simmons, The Demon; lead guitarist Ace Frehley, The Space Ace; drummer Peter Criss, The Catman. What they presented in concert was the greatest show on Earth, with explosions, blood, fire-breathing, a rocket-launching guitar… At a Kiss concert, it was possible to believe a man could fly.

And at the heart of it was a great all-American rock band. While derided by serious music fans (and, of course, critics) as nothing more than a circus act, Kiss didn't sell 100 million records by fluke. In the band's vast catalogue are some of the greatest and most influential rock albums of all time.

In the 40 years since the release of the first Kiss album, there have been 19 more studio albums, numerous live albums and compilations, and – most ambitious of all – four solo albums from the original band members, released on the same date: September 18, 1978.

Much of the classic Kiss material dates from the 70s, but in the following decade – without Frehley and Criss, and more importantly, without the make-up – Kiss rode the glam-metal wave they had done so much to inspire.

When Stanley and Simmons founded Kiss in New York City in early 1973, their primary influences were British, from The Beatles and the Stones through to Led Zeppelin, The Who and Slade. In turn, Kiss influenced a generation of rock musicians, especially in America. Their music was an inspiration for such diverse acts as Mötley Crüe, Anthrax, Pantera and Stone Temple Pilots.

In 1990, Nirvana covered the Kiss song *Do You Love Me?* and in April 2014, both Kiss and Nirvana will be inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame at a ceremony in New York, where the Kiss story began so many years ago.

Paul Elliott

REX

Essential Classics

Kiss

CASABLANCA, 1974

When the first Kiss album was released on February 18, 1974, the band's make-up design was not yet perfected – but the music was fully formed. From the start, Kiss wrote anthems. Seven songs from the album would become Kiss standards: *Strutter*, *Cold Gin*, *Firehouse*, *Deuce*, *Nothin' To Lose*, *100,000 Years* and *Black Diamond*. Boozehound Ace Frehley wrote *Cold Gin* but lacked the bottle to sing it. Instead, the staunchly teetotal Simmons did.

Kiss was not a hit at the time – US chart peak: No.87 – but it stands alongside *Aerosmith*, *Montrose* and *Van Halen* as one of the classic debut albums that built American hard rock in the 1970s.

Alive!

CASABLANCA, 1975

The title screamed for attention, and it came. This double-live album turned Kiss into superstars.

Their first two studio records had bombed. The third reached the US Top 40 but had no hit single. A live album was a no-brainer for a band that had built its reputation on stage, but a double album was costly, a high-stakes gamble. It paid off when *Alive!* hit the Top 10.

The album was a tour de force and a coming of age for Kiss as an arena-rock behemoth – as illustrated by the band's definitive, crowd-pleasing anthem *Rock And Roll All Nite*, which became, at last, their first hit single. *Alive!* marked the birth of a legend.

Destroyer

CASABLANCA, 1976

With their fourth album, Kiss reached for the stars and created their masterpiece. Their first three studio records were simplistic rock'n'roll, banged out fast. For *Destroyer*, they hired Bob Ezrin, producer of Alice Cooper and Lou Reed. As a result, Kiss sounded bigger, better and smarter.

Detroit Rock City is a juggernaut. *God Of Thunder* is an epic befitting its title – written by Stanley but sung by Simmons on Ezrin's orders, it became the bassist's signature song. And Ezrin transformed a soppy love song by Peter Criss into the orchestrated hit ballad *Beth*. "It's an ambitious album," Stanley said, "and it stands the test of time."

Alive II

CASABLANCA, 1977

Kiss made their big breakthrough with *Alive!* Two years later came the sequel, and it was another blockbuster. Recorded on the *Love Gun* tour, *Alive II* reached No.7 on the US chart, two places higher than *Alive!* It was also a better representation of the Kiss live experience. The band sounded more powerful on tracks such as *I Stole Your Love*, *Shout It Out Loud* and *Makin' Love*. The audiences were more hysterical. And the original vinyl-issue gatefold cover opened to reveal the full OTT splendour of Kiss on stage.

Also included were five new studio tracks. The best of them, Frehley's *Rocket Ride*, is as woozy as the man himself.

Creatures Of The Night

CASABLANCA, 1982

On the simplest level, *Creatures Of The Night* is the heaviest Kiss album. More complex is the story of its creation.

By 1982, Ace Frehley had quit. His appearance on this album's cover was purely to reassure fans as the band's popularity waned.

Behind the scenes, several guitarists auditioned. In the end, the job went to Vinnie Vincent, who co-wrote and recorded three tracks. Somehow, Kiss pulled it off. Although the album wasn't a hit, it restored their credibility via thunderous songs – *I Love It Loud*, *War Machine* and the title track – with a drum sound bigger than John Bonham's.

Superior Reputation cementing

Hotter Than Hell

CASABLANCA, 1974

The second Kiss album was, like the first one, a flop. *Hotter Than Hell* peaked at No.100 in the US. Even so, it's one of their most influential records.

Producers Kenny Kerner and Richie Wise, who cut the band's debut, gave this album the rawness and hard edge of garage rock. The heaviest song, *Parasite*, was later recorded by Anthrax, and Gene Simmons' twisted ballad *Goin' Blind* (*'I'm 93, you're 16'*) was covered by grunge oddballs The Melvins.

Best of all were two songs by Paul Stanley: *Got To Choose*, one of the band's loosest and coolest numbers, and the thumping title track, which was inspired by Free's *All Right Now*.

Dressed To Kill

CASABLANCA, 1975

The band's third album is their purest rock'n'roll record, with a stripped-down sound and a spontaneous feel typified by its most famous song, *Rock And Roll All Nite*. Neil Bogart, the head of Casablanca Records, took a hands-on approach with *Dressed To Kill*, co-producing the album with the group. It sounded much cleaner and punchier than the preceding album, *Hotter Than Hell*. As Ace Frehley said: "There's a lot of energy in this record."

It's also full of great songs: *Room Service*, *Rock Bottom*, *C'mon And Love Me*, and, of course, *Rock And Roll All Nite*. And the album's cover is a classic too, with the guys posing in suits borrowed from manager Bill Aucoin.

Rock And Roll Over

CASABLANCA, 1976

Eight months after *Destroyer*, Kiss returned with the symbolically titled *Rock And Roll Over*. *Destroyer* had been considered a sell-out. "The fans hated it," Simmons said.

The band responded by ditching all the fancy stuff to recreate what Stanley called the "primitive quality" of *Alive!* To this end, *Rock And Roll Over* was recorded at the disused Star Theatre in Nanuet, New York, with Eddie Kramer, the producer of *Alive!* The theatre's ambience was perfectly suited to crunchy, no-frills rock songs such as *I Want You* and *Calling Dr Love*.

Stanley wrote *Hard Luck Woman* with Rod Stewart in mind. With Peter Criss singing it like Rod, it was another huge hit.

Love Gun

CASABLANCA, 1977

The band's sixth studio album was the first to feature all four members singing lead vocals. It was also the last Kiss album to feature the full original line-up on every track. Ace Frehley would be absent for most of the studio tracks on *Alive II*, and Peter Criss would appear on just one song on *Dynasty*. But on *Love Gun*, they still sounded tight.

The album's title track is the ultimate expression of Paul Stanley's oversexed persona, and an all-time classic Kiss song. On *Shock Me*, Frehley sings lead for the first time, sounding effortlessly cool – or maybe just pissed. And on *Hooligan*, Criss delivers the brilliant payoff: *'I'm a hooligan/ Won't go to school again…'*

Ace Frehley

CASABLANCA, 1978

There was a joke about the Kiss solo albums that became received wisdom: they shipped platinum and returned double platinum. Gene Simmons put the record straight, telling *Classic Rock*: "They all sold at least a million apiece."

The surprise was that Ace Frehley's album was the most successful. The wayward guitarist scored a Top 20 hit with a breezy version of the Russ Ballard song *New York Groove*. What Ace delivered was a smoking, balls-out, hard-rock record with flashes of his goofball humour. And without Gene and Paul around, he could sing on *Ozone*: *'I'm the kind of guy who likes feelin' high…'*

GETTY

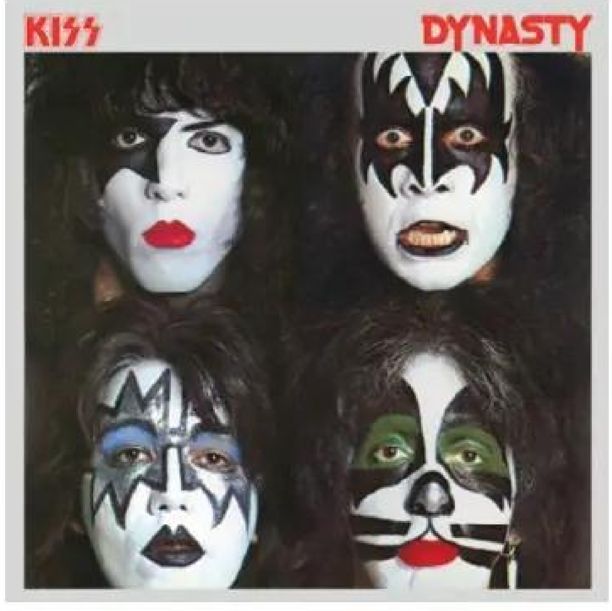
Superior Reputation cementing

Paul Stanley

CASABLANCA, 1978

Of the four solo albums released on the same day in 1978, Paul Stanley's sounded the most like Kiss. Essentially, it was an extension of his role as the band's primary songwriter and lead vocalist – with, in his words, "my personality magnified".

Tonight You Belong To Me is a sensational song with an intense emotional charge – rated by Stanley as one of his best. Similarly, *It's Alright* is pure kick-ass Kiss. But on two tracks, he pushed the envelope. *Take Me Away (Together As One)* is the deepest song he's written, and *Hold Me, Touch Me (Think Of Me When We're Apart)* is the height of camp. Ultimately, it's the best Kiss album Kiss never made.



Dynasty

CASABLANCA, 1979

Timing is everything. In 1979, rock fans launched the protest campaign 'Disco Sucks!' At a baseball game in Chicago, a crate filled with offending records, mostly by the Bee Gees, was blown up on the pitch. And in the same year, Kiss put out a disco song.

I Was Made For Loving You was a brilliant synthesis of disco and hard rock, and a US Top 20 hit. Parent album *Dynasty* reached the Top 10. But this one song alienated many Kiss fans, and precipitated the band's decline in America.

For all that, *Dynasty* is a good album, with genius pop-rock songs, alongside Frehley's grittily autobiographical *Hard Times*.

Unmasked

CASABLANCA, 1980

Unmasked is a fantastic pop-rock album, although Paul Stanley has a different assessment: "We lost our balls," he said. The producer on *Dynasty* and *Unmasked* was Vini Poncia, who had worked with Ringo Starr and *Wonder Woman* actress Lynda Carter, and also on Peter Criss' solo album.

In hindsight, Stanley felt that Poncia "sanitised" Kiss. But there are great songs on *Unmasked*: Stanley's power-pop doozy *Tomorrow*, Simmons's *Naked City*, even Frehley's barmy *Torpedo Girl*.

The album featured Criss on the cover, but was recorded with drummer Anton Fig. By the time *Unmasked* was released in May 1980, Criss was out of the band.

Lick It Up

MERCURY, 1983

It was the big reveal: the make-up was finally off. And as *Sounds* joked: "What ugly bastards they turned out to be."

The reinvention of Kiss was Stanley's idea, and it worked. Beginning in 1983, the new-look Kiss achieved a remarkable comeback. Having already used the perfect title for this album – *Unmasked* – they named it *Lick It Up* after a song that was classically Kiss. The tone was fast, flashy heavy metal, typified by Simmons's *Young And Wasted*. Less impressive was Stanley's rapping on *All Hell's Breakin' Loose*.

Guitarist Vinnie Vincent would be fired after the *Lick It Up* tour, but the album sold well – proof Kiss could survive on their music alone.

Revenge

MERCURY, 1992

Kiss' most underappreciated record. The band's 16th studio album was dedicated to the memory Eric Carr, the drummer who had served Kiss for 10 years before succumbing to cancer on November 24, 1991, the day that Freddie Mercury also died.

But with former Black Sabbath drummer Eric Singer in place of Carr, and producer Bob Ezrin back for a third time, *Revenge* was a shrewd repositioning of Kiss at a time when grunge was king.

A heavier sound was established with Simmons's sinister opening track *Unholy*. And another Top 5 UK hit came with *God Gave Rock 'N' Roll To You II*, an update of an old Argent song, supersized in classic Kiss style.

Good Worth exploring

Gene Simmons

CASABLANCA, 1978

Where Stanley and Frehley took the route-one approach to their solo albums, Simmons went completely off-piste. He enlisted an all-star cast of backing musicians, including Joe Perry, Bob Seger, Donna Summer and his then girlfriend Cher. Others on his wish list were unavailable: Lennon and McCartney, and the world's most famous dog, Lassie.

Simmons later said his album was "disjointed", but it includes some of the best songs he's ever written: *Radioactive*, *Man Of 1,000 Faces*, the Beatles homage *See You Tonite*. And on a version of *When You Wish Upon A Star* from Disney's *Pinocchio*, Simmons cried as he sang it.

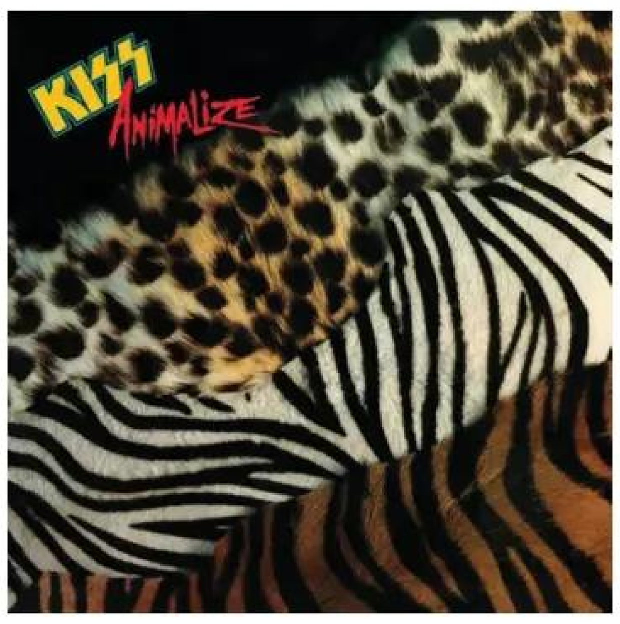
Music From 'The Elder'

CASABLANCA, 1981

This concept album was based on a fantasy tale written by Gene Simmons, and conceived as the soundtrack to a movie.

The movie was never made, and the album bombed. But in terms of artistry and ambition, there has never been another Kiss album like it. Produced by Bob Ezrin, *'The Elder'* was as close as they got to art rock. It has great songs, including *A World Without Heroes*, *Mr. Blackwell* and *Dark Light*, co-written with Lou Reed.

Simmons now describes this album as the product of "temporary insanity", but there was, in that madness, something approaching genius.

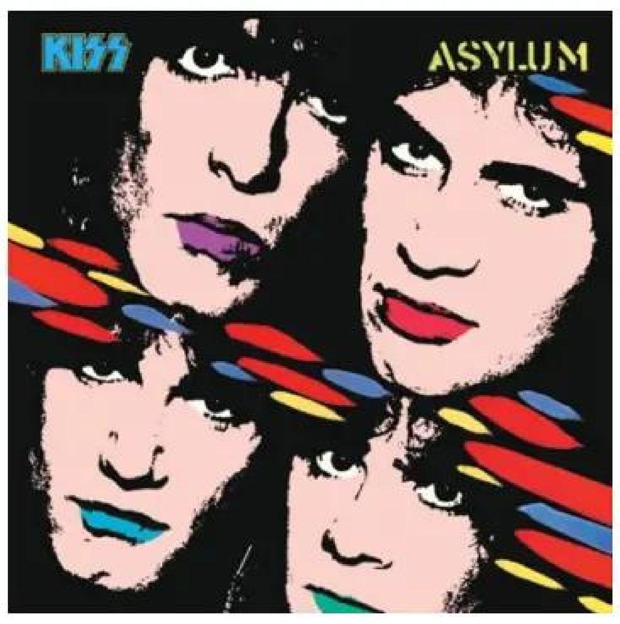


Animalize

MERCURY, 1984

The success of *Lick It Up* continued with the follow-up. *Animalize* was certified platinum in the US, the band's biggest seller since *Dynasty*. It was also the only Kiss album to feature lead guitarist Mark St. John, who joined as replacement for Vinnie Vincent.

The best songs on the album were Paul Stanley's – the exultant *Heaven's On Fire* and the moody *Thrills In The Night*. Gene's were phoned in, although he did contribute a memorable double entendre in *Burn Bitch Burn*: *'Wanna put my log in your fireplace.'* Sadly for Mark St. John, this was his one brief moment of fame. He died in 2007, aged 51.



Asylum

MERCURY, 1986

At the height of glam metal, Kiss were in competition with bands they'd influences, such as Mötley Crüe and Poison. *Asylum* was as flashy and trashy as anything that was coming out of the Sunset Strip scene – as illustrated by the album's final track, *Uh! All Night*.

The highlight was Paul's *Tears Are Falling*, an AOR anthem powered by a heavy, chugging riff. Gene was still coasting on half-baked numbers such as *Trial By Fire*. The album also marked the debut of lead guitarist Bruce Kulick, whose brother Bob had auditioned for Kiss back in 1973 and filled in for Ace, on *Alive II* and other Kiss albums. Bruce Kulick would stay with Kiss for ten years.

Crazy Nights

VERTIGO, 1987

For much of the 80s, Paul Stanley carried Kiss, while Gene Simmons was busy acting in movies and producing and managing other artists. The success of *Crazy Nights* owed everything to Stanley.

In contrast to the guitar-heavy style of 1984's *Animalize* and 1986's *Asylum* (on which St. John's replacement Bruce Kulick made his debut), *Crazy Nights* had a lighter sound, with keyboards high in the mix.

Stanley delivered three strong singles: power ballad *Reason To Live*, the euphoric *Turn On The Night*, and *Crazy Crazy Nights*, a Top 5 hit in the UK, and an 80s hair-metal classic.

Good Worth exploring

Hot In The Shade

VERTIGO, 1989

Some 14 years after Kiss had their biggest hit single in America with *Beth*, they returned to the US Top 10 with another ballad, *Forever* – the standout track from *Hot In The Shade*. For the only time in their career, Kiss used additional writers on every track on this album. Paul Stanley wrote *Forever* with Michael Bolton, and *Hide Your Heart* with Desmond Child and Holly Knight. An AOR classic, *Hide Your Heart* was also recorded in 1989 by Ace Frehley.

But among the 15 tracks were some clunkers, including two tracks written by Simmons with future Kiss guitarist Tommy Thayer. The band's lengthiest studio album proved that size isn't everything – even for Kiss.

Sonic Boom

ROADRUNNER, 2009

It had been 11 years since Kiss had made a new studio record, and Paul Stanley was determined that they should come back with a bang. "*Sonic Boom* is the perfect title for this album," he said. "It's earth-shaking and deafening!"

Guitarist Tommy Thayer made his debut on *Sonic Boom*. He even sang lead on one track, as did Eric Singer. But it was Stanley who hit the home runs with the Zeppelin-influenced *Modern Day Delilah* and the triumphant *Say Yeah*. And Simmons was back to his best on the sneering *Russian Roulette*.

It was followed in 2012 by the band's 20th studio album, *Monster*. That turned out to be a let down, but with *Sonic Boom*, they really nailed it.

Avoid

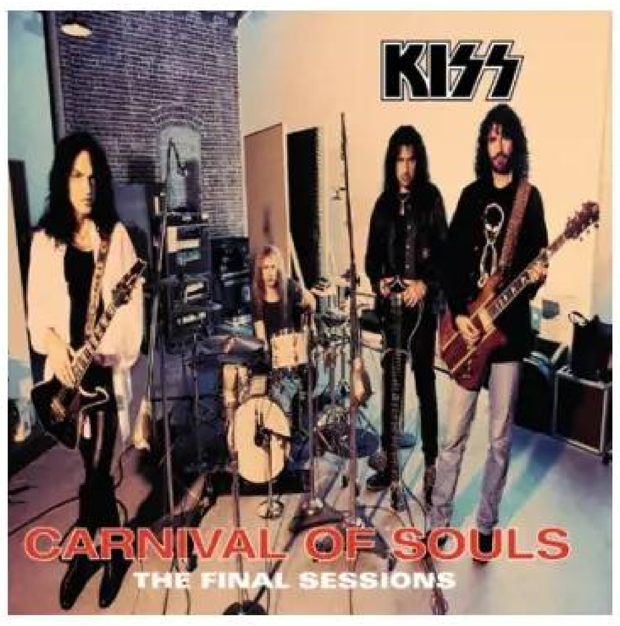
Monster

VERTIGO, 1989

The title of their most recent studio album was classic Kiss, but the record itself was less so.

The band had sounded revitalized on *Sonic Boom*, but three years later, on *Monster*, they lost that spark. Ahead of the album's release, Paul Stanley had hyped it up in typically overblown fashion: "A sensory overload," he said. "Powerful, heavy, melodic and epic." But in truth, there wasn't that much to shout about.

There were flashes of proper old school brilliance in Paul's daft rock'n'roll sermon *Hell Or Hallelujah* and Gene's monolithic *Back To The Stone Age*. But sadly the remainder was as flat as a week-old bitter shandy.

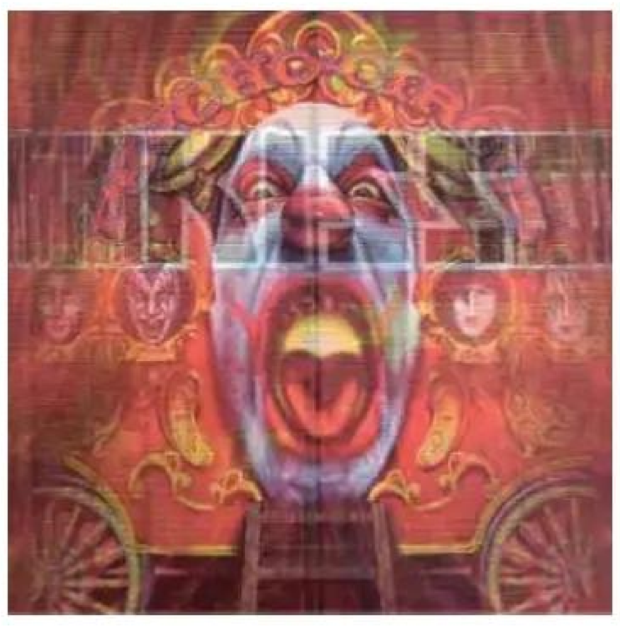


Carnival Of Souls

MERCURY, 1997

More than one hair metal-era tried their hand at The Grunge Album. Kiss's attempt, *Carnival Of Souls*, found them ditching the party anthems for a heavy, downbeat style similar to Soundgarden and Alice In Chains. It was a strange turnaround for a band that had been cited as a major influence by Kurt Cobain. Moreover, the notion of Kiss as an alternative rock band was ludicrous.

Disaster was averted when the 1996, the release of *Carnival Of Souls* was shelved when the classic line-up reunited. This album eventually snuck out a year later as a kind of 'official bootleg' deal.



Psycho Circus

MERCURY, 1998

In 1996, the prayers of Kiss fans were answered. The band's original line-up reunited, put the slap back on, and toured to huge success. Two years later came *Psycho Circus*, the first Kiss album since '79 to feature Ace Frehley and Peter Criss. But all was not as it seemed. Criss played on only one track, Frehley on two. Paul Stanley later admitted: "There was no real band."

Psycho Circus went Top 10 in the US. It had some good songs: Frehley's *Into The Void*, Simmons' *We Are One*. But so much of it sounded hollow and contrived – *You Wanted The Best* was just an advertising jingle. For the original Kiss, this was a miserable swansong.

"Go out on top. Don't leave it until some young punk knocks you out"

Stardate December 2018: **Gene Simmons** looks back on a year of booming business and ahead to the eventual Kiss retirement, and explains why Lady Gaga "is the only new rock star".

Words: **Henry Yates**

Somewhere off the Florida coast, Gene Simmons is reclining on the deck of a cruise ship, watching the hordes of Kiss Kruise attendees and contemplating his lifelong status as "the luckiest guy in the world". After another year of razzmatazz and royalties, it would appear to be business as usual for the planet's most openly commercial band. But with Kiss set to bid farewell with their End Of The Road Tour from January, Simmons's world is about to change in a big way.

Aren't you going to miss all this when Kiss call it a day?

Well, the touring band will stop, certainly. But Kiss will continue in other ways. Let's just cut through all the bullshit. I'm sixty-nine now and this is a great time to go. I'm in great shape, I'm strong, singing better than ever. By the end of the tour I'll be seventy-two, maybe even older. In terms of pride and self-respect and admiration for the fans – and our legacy – why the fuck would I want to be there running around in a rocket-powered wheelchair? If I was doing what Sir Paul [McCartney] – who I greatly admire – is doing I could do it into my mid-seventies. Jagger, I have to say, works his ass off. That's a tip of the hat. But if you're wearing sneakers and a T-shirt, you can do this into your mid-seventies or later. We're the hardest-working band, and that means I carry around forty pounds of armour. And if Jagger, God bless him, got into my outfit he'd pass out in the first half-hour.

> **"Why the f**k would I want to be running around in a rocket-powered wheelchair?"**

So you want to go out on a high?

Remember, we introduce ourselves: "You wanted the best, you got the best, the hottest band in the world." Why would we want to stay on stage a day longer than what we feel is legitimate? Those words have to mean something. We've all seen pathetic examples of bands who have come up and do sets and sit on chairs, because they can't stand up. I understand the need, the hunger, but [have some] self-respect and dignity, at least for the fans. When you're heavyweight champion of the world and you've knocked everybody out, go out on top, for God's sakes. Don't leave it until some young punk knocks you out, embarrassingly.

What about Kiss continuing as a studio band, though?

The cancer has pervaded and invaded the business. So everybody downloads and file-shares. Kiss is not a charity. I refuse to do something for free. There's private philanthropy. You get paid for doing what you're doing. I want to get paid too.

But don't you want to continue making records for artistic reasons?

No. I'd rather amass demos and do that kind of stuff, and every once in a while bring out the largest box set of all time.

Have you been impressed by any new bands this year?

No, I haven't seen anybody. Y'know, there are young bands that sound like Led Zeppelin. Years ago it was Black Keys. But nothing that makes you stand up and say: "Hold on there." The magic thing, especially in England, that happened is that Queen sounded different than Yes, who sounded different from Sabbath, and Zeppelin sounded like their own thing. They all sounded different and marched to the beat of their own drummer. They didn't look over their shoulder to find out what else was going on. I do like pop music a lot. ABBA is perhaps my favourite. When you look at Taylor Swift and all the other wonderful pop princesses, there's a formula. It is interchangeable songs, interchangeable stars. That goes for writing as well. It's interchangeable. But it wouldn't be a good idea for ABBA to do *Roundabout* by Yes, would it?

And that goes to what Mother Nature figured out a long time ago. Which is there's no other person on Earth like you. Your fingerprints make you completely individual. And what's missing is many new bands have the same fingerprint as the other bands. It's interchangeable.

By extension, are you saying you don't think it's been a good year for rock'n'roll?

Oh, it's horrific. And we've played this game before, perhaps. But it has to do with Napster and all the other ones that have just destroyed everything. Because they gave crack for free to young fans. They've trained them to download and file-share for free, without paying the artist who created it. 1958 until 1988 is thirty years. During that time, in all the genres of the music, you had The Beatles and Hendrix and the Stones and you can go on and on. Bowie and Prince and U2 and the heavy stuff, Iron Maiden and Metallica and all that. On and on. From 1988 until today – also thirty years – who's the new Beatles?

So you think digital platforms have impacted on the quality of bands?

No, I think the talent is there. Perhaps there's more talent than ever. Max Martin and the Swedish writers, those guys can write songs. But they can't form bands. So they have to keep writing pop songs for the young females, the pretty girls who can actually sell. Because there's that young female audience. And the boy bands sell well because it's their first boyfriends that these twelve-year-old girls are gonna get. And I'm all for that. I understand that. The Beatles started off with that. I get it. It's all great. It was great for The Monkees and on and on. But The Monkees didn't become The Beatles because they didn't write their own songs. And they didn't have a sense of identity. They were created. The Beatles was a real band. And we love the Foo Fighters, but that's an old band. They've been around over twenty years. I don't see a new band. Not because the talent is not out there. The Greta [Van Fleet] band is great and all that. But nobody's gonna get the chance we did, where a record company would give you millions of dollars, non-recoupable – in other

GETTY

Gene Simmons with Kiss at the Resurrection Fest music festival in Viveiro, Spain, July 2018.

words, for free. If the album was a bomb, you wouldn't have to give a penny back. What job lets you do that?

How will you fill your time if you're not touring with Kiss?
I have literally over 15 companies that are vying for my attention. Restaurant chains. A cannabis company. Real estate. There's barely enough time during the day to get through all of that.

What made you want to get involved with the cannabis business this year?
I changed my mind. I was dismissive and arrogant about everything based with drugs. When in fact, if you have a headache it's good to take an aspirin. And when we think about it, if a doctor pulls your tube, you do want to numb yourself or maybe get knocked out. So you are using drugs. Some drugs are good. Cigarettes are not good. They may give you cancer, but that's legal. Drinking, certainly a lot, will kill people on the highways, and you'll beat up your wife, and there are bar fights. Even recreationally, it seems to me, [cannabis] is the lesser of all the evils. I've still never been high, but I'm told it's calming. It doesn't make you want to fight. You just smile like an idiot and gaze off into space. But medicinally there's no argument – it cures all kinds of ailments. Epilepsy. PTSD…

***Classic Rock* is celebrating our twentieth anniversary. How do you feel about our coverage of Kiss over the years?**
It doesn't concern me, really. I guess overall it's okay. I only care if you print the photo, because we listen and perceive things visually. When I was a kid I didn't care what the writer wrote, I just wanted to see the photos. If the only thing you printed were photos, I'd be okay with that. Problem is, most new bands just aren't interesting-looking enough.

Gene Simmons (probably with mirrors on the inside of his shades as well as the outside) in Toronto, Canada, March 2018.

REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Is there anyone else around who you think has got that showmanship?
I think Lady Gaga is the only new rock star in the last twenty years. She's got the goods, she's got the songwriting, she's got the singing. I suggest you go see *A Star Is Born*. If she decides to do a rock band – just her and three or four guys backing her with guitars; fuck the dancers and the disco shit – you would see a legitimate rock star. She's the real deal. The other ones are nice. I like Ariana Grande and Britney Spears, I think they're terrific. But, y'know, there's that cliché – the cliché is you come out and you emphasise the sexuality, the boobs and the butt. That's all great, I'm a fan of that too. Gaga's about more. She's got swagger, if you see what I mean.

How were things going for Kiss back in 1998?
Well it wasn't affecting me, but the cancer that is downloading and file sharing was taking hold and it was killing off new bands. They had to go back to being bricklayers or factory workers, y'know, ethical, hard-working jobs. They couldn't devote enough time to their music and their art because they couldn't earn a living.

If you hate digital platforms so much, how comes Kiss are on Spotify?
You really can't [stop that], because the fans will download and file-share you anyway. And there's very little legal repercussion, because the legislation is not there, Because the legislators have no idea what it means. They'll say: "You have enough money, what are you complaining about?" My response is: 'Bitch, I didn't ask your opinion. I'll let you know when it's enough."

"I'm not the best-looking guy in the world. But when I walk by a mirror, it's difficult for me not to stand in awe of myself."

How did it feel to get the original band back together for 1998's *Psycho Circus*?
Well that wasn't the case, actually. The band got an outside producer, Bruce Fairbairn, and we started recording without Ace and Peter, because they started the lawyer shuffle: I want this, I want more, I want that. And we said: "No. You've been in and out of the band three different times." I don't want to get into it. And I continue to wish Ace and Peter well. Ace is here on the Kiss Kruise along with Bruce Kulick, and they're doing their own sets, and all are welcome. But you cannot rejoin the band. How many chances in life do you get? Y'know, usually when you stick your hand in a fire you'll get burned the first time. Here you get three different chances. You're done. But that doesn't mean I don't wish them well. So by *Psycho Circus* we tried to include them back in but it didn't work, so they only appeared on two or three tracks.

Mental health has been in the headlines this year. What's the secret to your bulletproof self-esteem?
Well, you've got nothing to lose by being confident. You've got everything to lose by not being confident. That beautiful girl sitting over there? You know you're not the best-looking guy in the world. But walk over there, arch your back and wax poetic. All she can say is no. But here's the big secret. There are a lot of girls out there – and some will say yes. If you never try, they all said no. I think people misunderstand my self-confidence. I'm delusionally self-confident. I know I'm not the best-looking guy in the world. But when I walk by a mirror, it's difficult for me not to stand in awe of myself. Even that phrase makes people think: "Oh fuck, you're not supposed to say that about yourself." And my question is: Why not? Look in the mirror and smile and laugh. This is all we've got."

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ROCK AND ROLL *Really* OVER

KEITH LEROUX/PRESS

After nearly 50 years, a brace of classic records, enough explosives to start a war and more make-up than a Boots warehouse, **Kiss** are calling it a day. *Classic Rock* joins the Gods Of Thunder on their private jet as they commence their farewell tour.

Words: **Jaan Uhelszki**

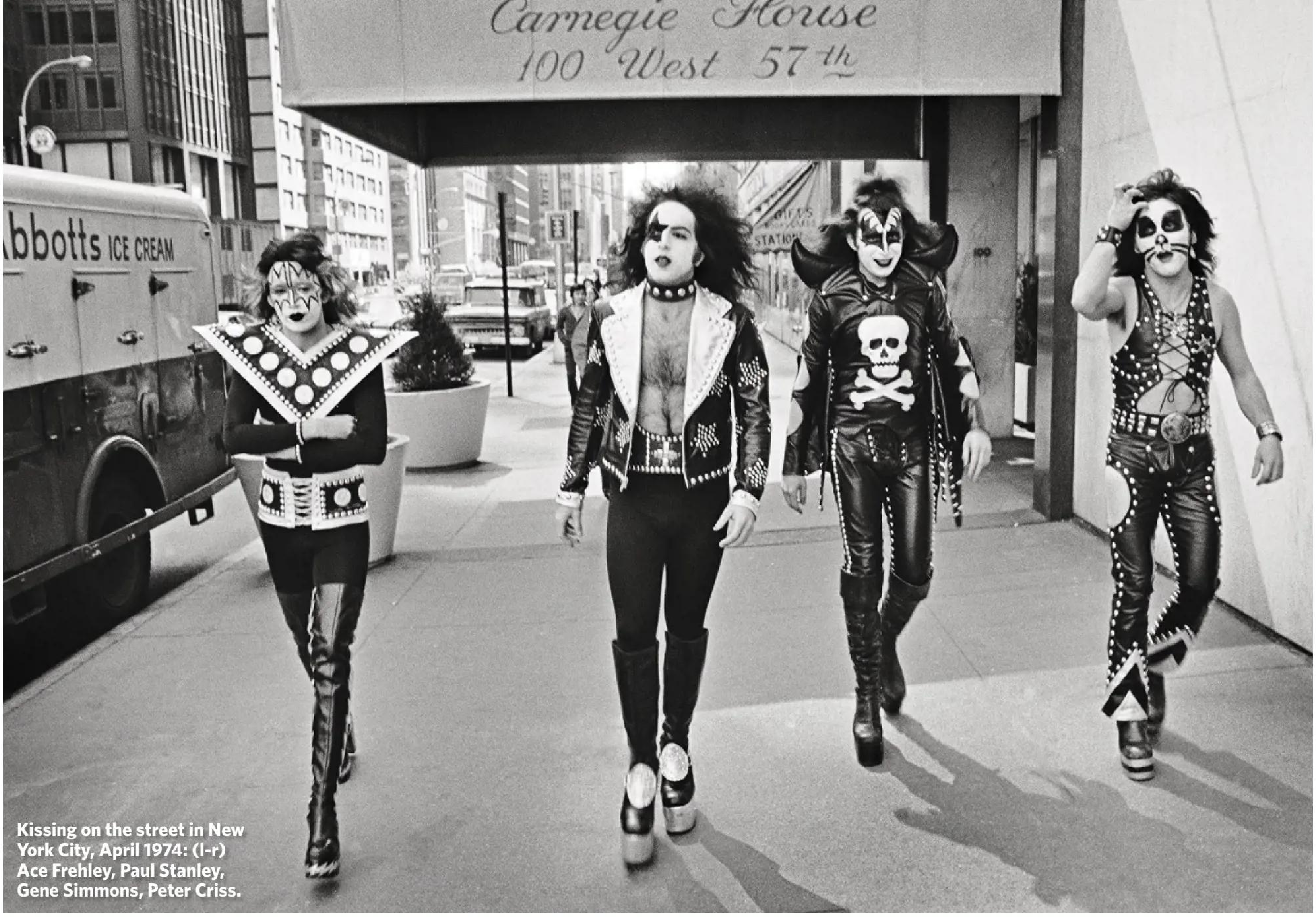
Iggy Pop claimed that he killed the 60s, but it turned out it was four semi-normal guys right off the streets of New York who really drove the final stake through heart of the peace-and-love decade nearly 46 years ago.

Gene Simmons, a former elementary school teacher; Paul Stanley, a cab driver with a heart-shaped face; Peter Criss, a sometime butcher and itinerant drummer who studied under the mighty Gene Krupa; and Ace Frehley, a gang member-cum-liquor delivery man. They stormed out of a $40-a-month fourth-floor walk-up in New York's Chinatown in their six-inch platforms and sweaty black leather looking like four beasts disgorged from the underworld, and unleashed an unholy and entirely masculine creed of sex, braggadocio, innuendo and conquest, all delivered at a screeching 110 decibels and addressing every young man's fantasies.

While the band's message has changed over the years (they've become more family-friendly and forswear any cursing during the show), they still attract legions of foot soldiers into the Kiss Army – even now, when they're calling it quits in one final tour they've dubbed the End Of The Road. (They've attempted to trademark the term with the US Patent office to prevent any other retiring bands from using it. Good luck with that.) At the time of writing, 71 dates are scheduled for North America, 26 for Europe and eight for Oceania, with plans to extend the tour.

Back at the beginning, the band were fuelled by high ambition, an unrelenting will, a prodigious work ethic and only the most rudimentary of musical talents. But they not only changed the face of musical history by painting it in Stein's Clown White, they also kicked off their own brand of revolution, putting music back in the hands of the ordinary people and turning it back into ⊳

FROM THE CLASSIC ROCK ARCHIVE 2019



Kissing on the street in New York City, April 1974: (l-r) Ace Frehley, Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Peter Criss.

GETTY x2 RIGHT: JEN ROSENSTEIN

a populist manifesto, picking up where Grand Funk Railroad left off by knocking rock music off of its lofty perch, stripping it of its perfect hair, wrecked cool and tight velvet stovepipe pants.

Prior to Kiss, rock stars seemed to exist in some distant Valhalla, breathing saffron-scented air, buying and wrecking Aston Martins, imbibing rare substances worth a king's ransom and rarely consorting with mere mortals unless they looked like supermodels or Beatle wives. In short, rock stars were not like the rest of us.

But the members of Kiss were. They were a little unfinished. Outsiders, really, not the captains of the football team with a blonde cheerleader on their arm. Instead they more resembled the guy who sat next to you in Advanced Mathematics class. Meaning they were smart guys. Smart enough to know their history, and figuring out it was just about time for a sea change.

"It was the mid-seventies, and people had had enough of the hippie, political thing and just wanted to have a good time," Gene Simmons explained a few years ago.

In the early days, Paul Stanley was fond of saying: "We are our fans." While not exactly true, it was an appealing notion. These days he's altered it a little, saying: "Our fans may not look like us but they can feel like us. I think that in our own way we've motivated people to, in their own way, be Kiss. Whether it's to become a writer, whether it's to become a country singer, whether it's to become an attorney, you name it."

"Gene and I feel much closer now. The war is over. Everything's good. We won."

Paul Stanley

Maybe at the heart of it was that Kiss has always been more than just a band. It was a state of mind; a place where feeling alienated was venerated, where boys were men, girls were groupies and nobody ever had to turn down the volume. But there's something compelling about the egalitarian ideal that anyone could do what Kiss did. Kiss weren't obviously handsome, rich, cultured, preternaturally talented, advantaged or even art-school dropouts like their British counterparts, but the implied message was that, given the right circumstances and drive, anyone could become a rock star.

But to be accurate, self-empowerment wasn't really their early mission. That was to be bigger than the New York Dolls!

"Yes, that's true," says Simmons. "I remember Paul and I went to see the Dolls play at a local thing in New York City. It was right at the beginning; they came about six months before us. Paul and I were in the back of the hall, and we had our big hair, trying to look cool, but nobody knew us.

"The Dolls came on stage and we said: 'Wow, they look like real rock stars.' Then they started playing, and we looked at each other and, so help me God, I might've said it to him or he might've said it to me: 'We'll kill 'em.' You could see the lust and the blood running from our mouths as we vowed: 'We'll fucking destroy them.'

"They had the swagger and everything else, but they just couldn't play or sing; no harmony, the guitar playing was deficient. But boy they looked good. So Kiss was designed consciously as: let's put together the band we never saw on stage."

By doing that, they created a band that no one else had seen on stage either. If you don't count mid-career Alice Cooper.

"They're a good band. All these guys need is a gimmick," Cooper commented dryly about Kiss in 1974.

Kiss apparently took that comment to heart, and added more pyro, flash pots, fire-breathing and gushing blood. Frehley had a guitar that shot flames, and Stanley was one of the first artists to hurl himself into the audience – and damn the greasy face-paint slathering over everyone, which became a badge of honour for fans.

Audiences got them, but critics rarely did. *Rolling Stone* named them the Hype Of The Year in 1975, and legions of reviewers complained that they were "derivative", "prosaic", "simplistic" and mostly a joke, a band that catered to the lowest common denominator. It wasn't until 2014 that Kiss made it to the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame, and then only after fans were allowed to vote.

Kiss 2019: (l-r) Eric Singer, Paul Stanleya, Gene Simmons and Tommy Thayer.

They were always geniuses at self-promotion. Simmons had quite a bit of practice at self-invention, having emigrated from Israel to New York as Chaim Witz at the age of eight. He became Gene Klein, and began the task of turning himself into an American kid. So fraught with psychic landmines was he that turning himself into the God Of Thunder wasn't even a stretch.

As for Stanley, he had no less gargantuan a task. "I was a fat, chubby, unpopular kid who disguised himself as a good-looking, cocky frontman in a band, and somehow turned into it," says Stanley, who at 67 looks 20 years younger. "Hopefully we all find who we are and we become it."

That self-actualisation, inspirational stuff came later – probably about the time he wrote his book, *A Life Exposed*, in 2017 – but there was a flicker of it around the time the Kiss Army started swelling in 1979. An incipient fan club, it started as a grass-roots affair in January 1975 by two Kiss fans. They would identify themselves as the President and Field Marshal of the Kiss Army when they called their local radio station to request Kiss records. By the end of 1978, membership in the Kiss Army topped six figures, with merchandise revenues of $100 million a year.

"We definitely tapped into something. And a lot of times we weren't even aware of it, but we just kind of went with it," Frehley admitted in 2014. "I always used to say when we were in our peak I felt like I was riding this roller-coaster and I was holding on for dear life. A lot of the things I did were just on instinct, whether it be my songwriting or how I dressed or things I did. Luckily I have good instincts."

But that wasn't really true of Stanley and Simmons. They always had a plan for domination – world and otherwise – and stuck to it. Which is exactly why they are winging their way on a private jet to Glendale, Arizona, for the tenth stop on this final tour – and Frehley and Criss are not.

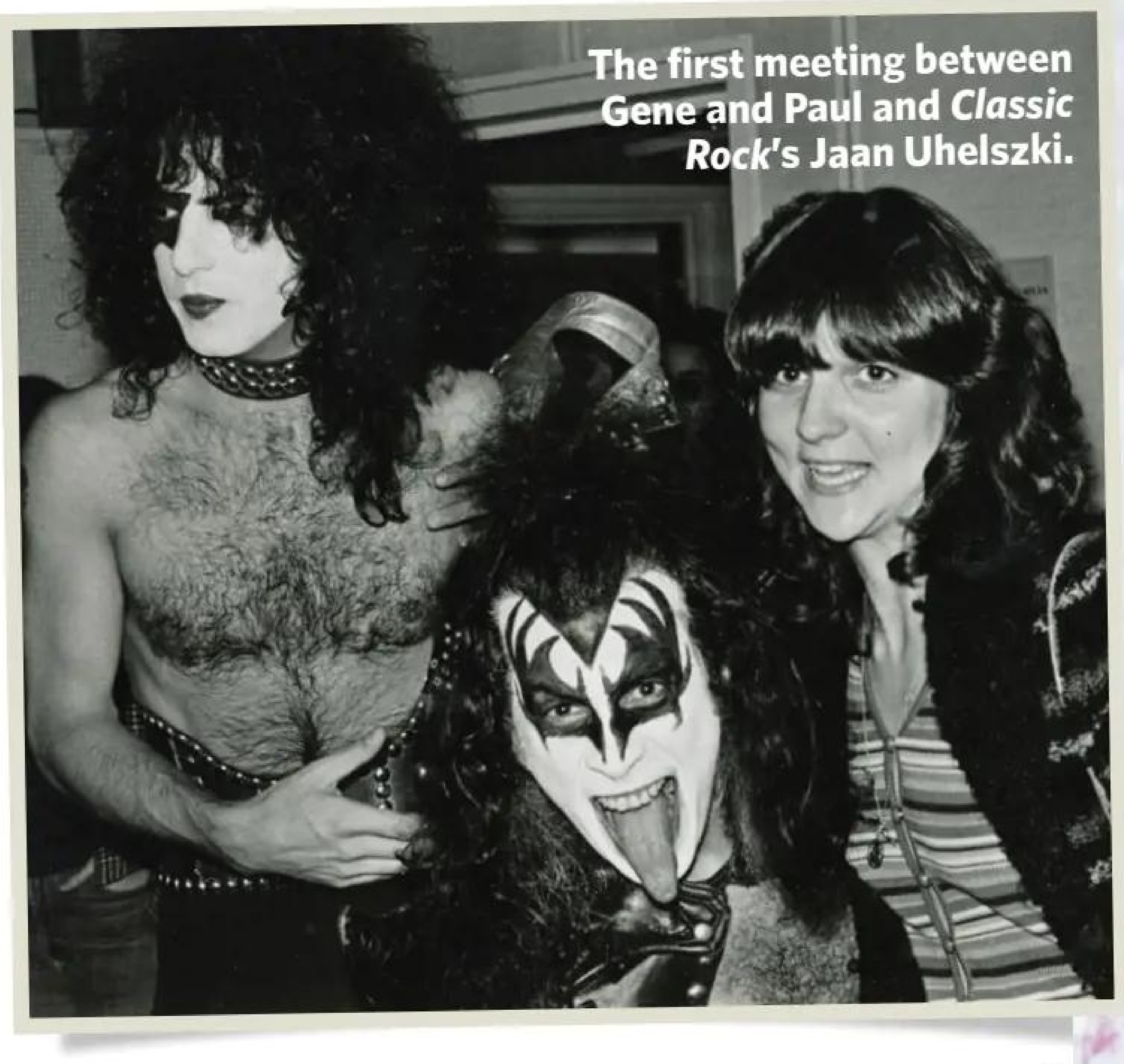
While a Kiss admirer, I wasn't there at the beginning. And when I did come face to face with these nightmarish figures in wobbly platform heels, abundant chest hair and aggressive face paint, it was by sheer happenstance.

After covering a David Essex record-release bash on the heels of his hit *Rock On*, I found myself in New York with a free night. Renowned Bowie photographer Leee Black Childers had invited me to a panel he was shooting for NARAS (the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences) and promised dinner afterwards. I said yes, although it wasn't because I was intrigued that the panel was titled Superstar Or Superstud. It was just the free dinner. I was hoping for the Russian Tea Room.

I was one of the first to arrive at Columbia Records' Studio B. There were just a handful of people sitting on folded chairs in a small room that couldn't have held more than 30 people comfortably, but most of the psychic space was already taken up by four looming creatures in fetish wear, looking like warlords from the underworld.

Criss wore a leather vest without anything under it, shivering in the windowless studio. Stanley was stripped to the waist, his chest hair curling menacingly, with a studded dog collar around his neck. Sitting next to him was Simmons, in more elaborate attire: a black leather jacket and pants with strategic holes cut out, and again a bare chest. Frehley was the only one fully covered up, in his futuristic spacesuit, his hair ratted out to there. At the time, it was impossible to know who was who; they had all switched their nameplates, except for Criss, who didn't have one at all – a metaphor that would play out over the course of his

> **"I was a chubby, unpopular kid who disguised himself as a good-looking, cocky frontman in a band."**
> **Paul Stanley**



The first meeting between Gene and Paul and *Classic Rock*'s Jaan Uhelszki.

PRESS

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tenure in the band. But on that chilly October night, Paul Stanley was Ace Frehley, Gene Simmons was Paul Stanley and Ace Frehley, impersonated Simmons with aplomb, aided no doubt by the large gin and tonic in a clear plastic cup before him, something Simmons, a lifetime teetotaler, would never partake of.

Other participants on this forward-looking panel about sex and gender in rock included Danny Fields, a zeitgeist spotter who had discovered Iggy And The Stooges, signed the MC5 to Elektra Records and would go on to manage the Ramones; Wayne/Jayne County, the first transgender rock artist, and part of the Warhol crowd; Jerry Brandt, manager of rock's second transgender figure, the disturbing Jobriath; industry publicist Connie De Nave; and Richard Robinson, husband of celebrity wag Lisa Robinson and notable at the time for producing Lou Reed's first solo album.

What struck me that night wasn't the all-industry star-power gathered in a small room, but that each time the panel mediator, DJ Alison Steele, asked something of the members of Kiss, their reply was: "It's only rock and roll, but I like it," no matter what the question. Every single time. They had the sheer bad-boy audacity to not only not do what was expected of them, but also to flaunt it in the faces of what was then the music-industry glitterati. It was chilling how they never broke character once, no matter how awkward and non-sequitur their canned answer was. These were monsters who oozed out a collective nightmare, and they were hell-bent on staying that way for the entire duration of the hour-long panel.

Somewhere around the 20-minute mark, I knew I had to get them into the pages of *Creem* magazine, where I was a senior editor. I thought they fitted right into our rebellious, there-wasn't-a-rule-we'd-obey, fuck-you-if-you-can't-take-a-joke aesthetic.

It appeared I was the only one who thought that way. "They're New York Dolls clones," my fellow editor Lester Bangs said dismissively. "Comic-book trash," spat Dave Marsh. "If you want those clowns in *Creem*, you're the one who'll have to write it," warned features editor Ben Edmonds. "And it better be fucking good."

"When I go out in the crowd on that zip-line, there's this sense of being invincible. To be Superman with a guitar isn't nothing."

Paul Stanley

No matter the derision from my colleagues, I knew I was on to something. Recalling that old saw from Victor Hugo written 121 years before Kiss had ever picked up their first tube of lipstick – "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come" – I was sure that idea had arrived, and that it was wearing black leather.

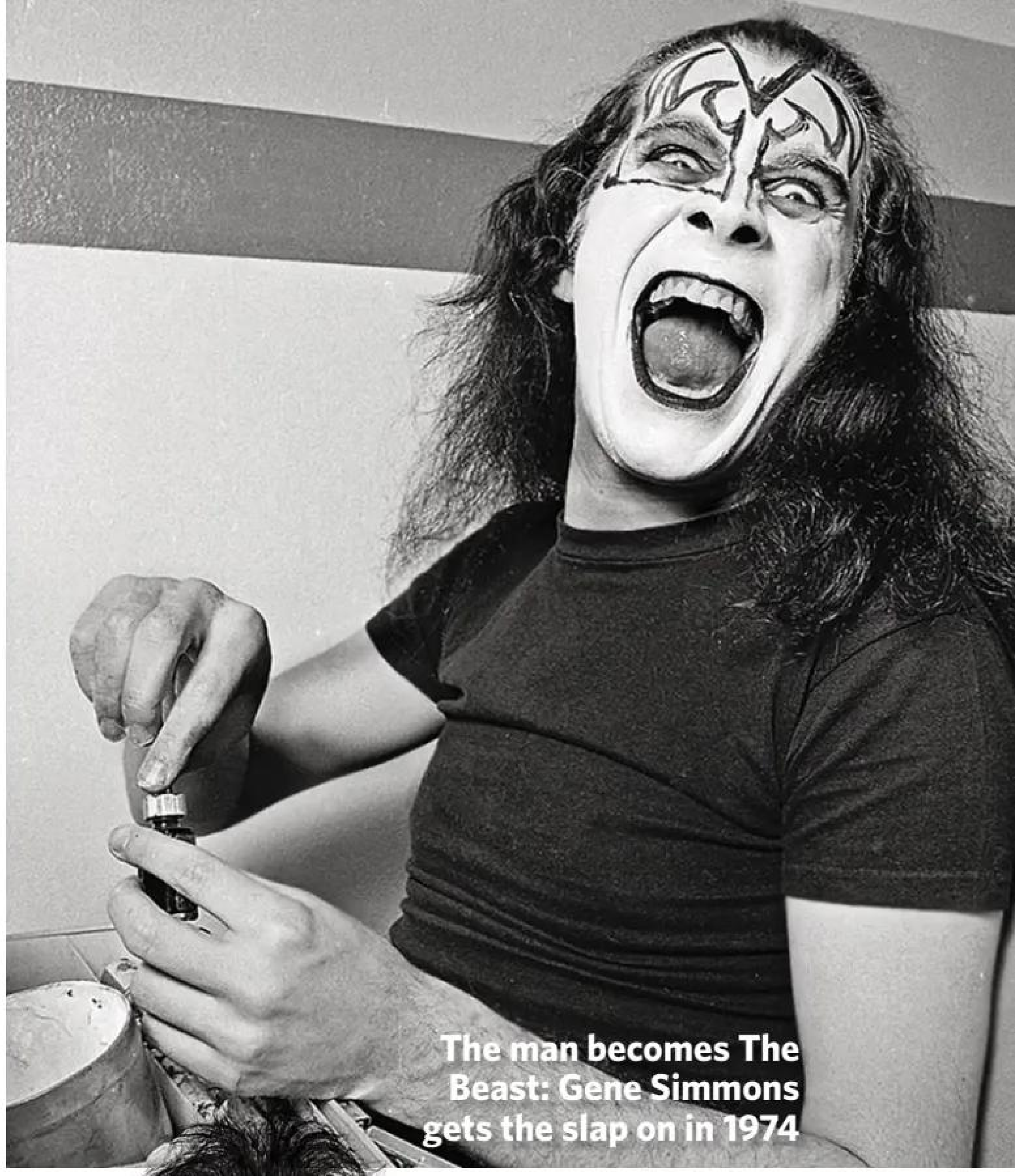
That's how I found myself a month later with a craft knife in my hand, sitting in front of a pile of photographs of Kiss in make-up and civilian clothes. In out-takes from the *Dressed To Kill* album cover, the band members were posed hiding their faces behind newspapers, piling into a phone booth in their suits and ties and then coming out in full regalia, emerging from a subway with fists flourished, performing Herculean tasks in which these four not-so-superheroes saved the world from bland music by sabotaging a John Denver concert. I not unexpectedly titled it 'Kiss KOMIX'. With that knife, I carved out a dubious niche for myself as the unofficial Kiss Editor.

Over the decades I have continued to monitor that long-standing beat, although I have to say that when I look back I find I miss the era when Kiss were dangerous, inscrutable, inappropriate and just badass.

There was a mystique about the band in those days. Stanley used to say: "I think we get so many groupies because everyone wants to fuck their fantasy or their nightmare. Someone in leather and make-up fucking you must be pretty strange." It makes one wonder how many times the band members engaged in coitus while suited up.

"It was *God Of Thunder*, from *Destroyer*, that turned me on to rock'n'roll, because Gene Simmons sang it," remembers Babes In Toyland's

Kiss performing at the Calderone Theater, New York City, August 1975.



The man becomes The Beast: Gene Simmons gets the slap on in 1974

BELOW: GENE: JEN ROSENSTEIN; TOP GETTY X2

"We have slightly different points of views about stuff. I think I'm more infatuated with myself than Paul is."

Gene Simmons

Kat Bjelland. "It sounded heavy, mean and evil. Like his soul was being ripped out of his chest. It gave me the shivers."

Those were the days when Kiss were never photographed out of make-up, and kept bandanas in their pockets to quickly cover their faces in case lurking photographers actually figured out who they were.

In 1975 I slapped on my own Stein's Clown White make-up, studded cuffs, black leotard, plastic-encased spider-belt buckle and seven-inch stilettoes, and strapped on a red Fender to perform with the band during *Rock And Roll All Night* in front of 5,000 fans and the members of Rush. Never mind that my guitar wasn't plugged in, I still got to feel what it was like to be a member of Kiss – or, as I noted at the time, that I was one-fifth of a sadistic cheerleading squad (although Stanley swore I looked like Minnie Mouse!). I called the piece *I Dreamed I Was On Stage With Kiss In My Maidenform Bra*, after a long-running print ad that depicted women in their underwear waking up in unusual places. But certainly none were more unusual than on stage in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, with Paul, Gene, Ace and Peter.

The next morning after the show, we all said our goodbyes and Simmons offhandedly said to me as I walked out: "Whenever you feel like putting on the make-up again, give us a call."

Which is how I found myself 44 years later in their G-4 Gulfstream private plane on a late afternoon in February, the day before Valentine's Day, sitting across from the God Of Thunder.

"You still wearing your Maidenform bra?" Simmons greets me as I walk down the narrow carpeted aisle of the plane. He's much more understated than years past, his face unlined, wearing a pair of black track pants, a long-sleeved denim shirt with three buttons undone, his trademark black wrap-around sunglasses that he wears day or night, a black oversized hoody, his immovable hair tied back and tucked up under a black baseball hat emblazoned with the money bag logo – which he holds the trademark for, along with his signature where the two 'S's in his name are money signs. Simmons has applied for more than 182 trademarks including 'Nude Car Wash', 'Trophy Wife', 'Sextacy' and simply '?enis'. Of all of the ones he's tried to register, he's succeeded 44 times. And yes, he did score ?enis!

Even in a #MeToo era, Gene Simmons will always be Gene Simmons. Although recently he has had to pay the price, because the times are different and he realises that he needs to move with them. There are few public incidents, like the one in 2001 when he appeared on Terry Gross's PBS *Fresh Air* radio show, telling the august radio host: "If you want to welcome me with open arms, I'm afraid you're also going to have to welcome me with open legs."

But in 2018 Simmons settled a lawsuit with a DJ in San Bernardino, California, who accused him of sexual misconduct during a November 2017 interview promoting Rock & Brews (a chain of restaurants Simmons and Stanley co-own), claiming he took her hand and kept depositing it on his knee, and peppered his answers with sexual innuendo.

That came only weeks after Simmons was reportedly banished from appearing on Fox News owing to "inappropriate and sexist antics" during an office visit. In response to the ban, he issued the following statement: "While I believe that what is being reported is highly exaggerated and misleading, I am sincerely sorry that I unintentionally offended members of the Fox team during my visit."

"Yeah, these days I don't even order room service if I'm by myself. I always need a witness," reveals ▷

Gene Simmons: The Demon takes his last bow.

KEITH LEROUX/PRESS

Simmons, shaking his head and appearing genuinely hurt. But not especially contrite.

I cleaned your pillowcase for you, Gene," coos a leggy flight attendant named Kate who is poured into her tight black shirtwaist dress embellished with her name and a very subtle Kiss logo. "I couldn't get the stain out," she pouts.

"Oh, that's okay. We're men," replies Simmons, puffing out his chest a little.

"He likes to be dirty. In more ways than one," says Eric Singer, who overhears the flight attendant as he walks into the plane, settling in his seat. Drummer Singer has been the Cat Man in the band since 1991, after Peter Criss's replacement, Eric Carr, died of cancer.

The innuendo about Simmons isn't as pertinent as it used to be. A rock Lothario who claimed to have had sex with 4,987 women (and had the Polaroid photographs to prove it), Simmons has been married to Canadian actress Shannon Tweed since 2011 and has given up all that.

"My schmeckle has been in a jar on the mantle for the past eight years," he jokes. "Seriously, not one other woman since I've been married," he says, emphasising each word.

> **"These days I don't even order room service if I'm by myself. I always need a witness."**
>
> **Gene Simmons**

Although it doesn't prevent him from looking.

"I like girls," he says ruefully. Later, when a stunning blonde named Shana sidles up to him backstage at the venue, he shakes his head with exaggerated remorse, pointing to his wedding band and saying: "Too late."

"Is there anything I can get for you?" the fetching Kate asks Simmons as she reappears, balancing a small tray with an array of pastries and chocolate confections.

"I think I'll have the chocolate coffee cake," he says. "I've always been a sucker for chocolate."

"I remember," I add. "But that one time you got more than you bargained for," referring to the time when I accompanied Simmons to a post-Kiss show bash the promoter had thrown for the band in '74, after they broke attendance records previously held by Elvis Presley at Cobo Hall in Detroit.

"You were there with him?" asks latter-day guitarist Tommy Thayer, who began with the Kiss organisation after his Portland-based band Black N Blue disbanded in 1995. "We'd heard that story a hundred times, but we never knew that there was a witness to the first time Gene got high!"

Flaming youth: Gene in full fire-breathing mode.

GETTY

BELOW: JEN ROSENSTEIN

"We weren't even sure it was true!" adds Singer.

"So what was it like?" demands Thayer.

"'Dazed and confused' doesn't even begin to cover it!" I say, laughing.

"What does?" asks Singer, urging for more, like a kid pleading for a bedtime story.

It was the promoter's birthday as well as a party for Kiss, so there was a giant birthday cake. But after it was cut, waitresses made the rounds with plates of chocolate brownies.

"Don't even think of having any of those," I cautioned Simmons.

"Why not? I love brownies," he replied, a little querulously.

"I know you love brownies. But just don't. They're hash brownies."

"Hash brownies?" He looked bewildered, as if trying to figure out why anyone would want to defile chocolate with drugs.

Deciding to disregard anything I had to say, he took a fistful of the brownies and devoured them. Three big fat ones, dusted with powdered sugar.

"It was six brownies," Simmons chimes in.

"It was three," I replied. "One would have put you over the top."

And that's where he remained. Once the THC reached his bloodstream, it was like being with ET tentatively discovering the wonders of planet Earth, complete with long fingers outstretched to touch ordinary objects.

"Are my feet as big as I think they are?" "Does my head look funny? Is it really small?"" Why are my hands so big?" "Are my teeth shiny?" he worried, running a black chipped nail up and down over his front teeth.

After leaving the party, on the way to the car he came out with a steady stream of questions, the border between what he was thinking and saying out all but demolished.

"I need milk!" he suddenly bellowed, I'm sure louder than he meant. The driver seemed alarmed, but pulled into the only store that was open in Detroit's inner city. Which by no means made it safe. More than a little seedy, it was inhabited by winos, late-shift workers and ladies of the night.

When we entered the place, Simmons said in a carefully articulated but booming voice: "May I have a glass of milk, please?" I remember the man behind the counter as if it were yesterday. "We don't sell glasses of milk, son."

"I don't remember that," says Simmons. "Mostly what I remember was how proud I was of the size of my… er, manhood."

"Funny, I don't recall that at all. But then I didn't have any brownies."

"I'm not sure it's hit me yet that this is the end," Thayer says, after the plane is airborne. "After it all winds down, I bet that's when fans will finally accept me," he says laughing. "Or maybe miss me."

A genuinely nice man, Thayer is the bridge between the rock gods and mortal men. He started out a Kiss fan, cutting out photos of the band from rock magazines when he was 14, a skill that served him well when, after his previous band Black N Blue broke up, Simmons and Stanley asked him if he would consider being the photo editor for their 440-page, eight-and-a-half-pound behemoth photo book *KissTORY*, which was published in 1995.

"The first time I ever saw Kiss was in the back pages of *Circus* magazine in 1974, and I thought they looked amazing," he recalls. "I'd sit around with my friends and draw pictures of Kiss."

After *KissTORY* came out, the band kept Thayer on, promoting him to tour manager when the one they had quit. He re-taught Frehley and Criss their parts when the original band re-formed for the first reunion tour in 1996, and was on hand when the 2001 reunion tour fell apart. It was then that Simmons and Stanley asked him to become a permanent member of the band, much to his surprise.

"When I'm on stage being the lead guitarist in Kiss, it's a special place to be, because this is what every kid in the world dreams about doing and I'm the one that's up there doing it," says Thayer, at 57 the youngest member of Kiss.

"Tommy is so nice it reeks," Eric Singer says, laughing. "Paul and Gene call him Switzerland, because he usually just takes the middle ground on things."

"That is what they call me," Thayer says when I look sceptical. "Paul usually sits in the back of the plane and Gene sits in the front, and I'm always in the middle, and I'm the intermediary. Sometimes I think I'm the glue that holds things together." He stops suddenly, as if he'd said too much.

While Simmons and Stanley insist that they have never been on better terms, they still ride in separate SUVs en route from the plane to the venue, and when they line up for photos at the meet-and-greets with fans the two never stand next to each other.

"I think Gene and I feel much closer now," insists Stanley. "Well we weren't always, of course. You know, 'old too quick, wise too late.' But there's really very little that's worth fighting about any more. There's a whole lot to be happy about. If there ever was a war at times… " he pauses a beat too long. "The war is over. Everything's good. We won."

"When Paul and I met we recognised certain things that we had in common and other things that we didn't," Simmons says later. "He's the brother I never had, and all those sorts of sound bites, but it's kinda true. And I know it's the same for him. What's most different is we have slightly different points of views about stuff. I think I'm more infatuated with myself than Paul is," he adds with a show of candour. ▷

"After it all winds down, I bet that's when fans will finally accept me."

Tommy Thayer

PORTRAIT: JEN ROSENSTEIN; ERIC LIVE: JAY GILBERT/PRESS

Stanley clip-clops out of his dressing room in his war paint, costume, heavy linked silver choker, truly magnificent mane of black hair and his heavy platform boots, picking his way around the tables of food to meet with David Butuk, Yvette Butuk and Ron Johnson, tonight's Ultimate Fans from nearby Phoenix. For upwards of $6,500, fans can buy passes to meet their heroes, try on their regalia and chit-chat backstage with them. And now there's a bittersweet aspect to the Ultimate Fan Experience, because this will be the final time Kiss will be in their city.

Stanley walks up to the trio; at six-foot-eight in his platform boots he looms over them. "Without you, there's no us," he says, with such sincerity and conviction it's hard to believe he's said the same thing probably 10,000 times. Yet still it's affecting.

They pose for photos, Stanley wrapping a comradely arm around them, holding it there longer than he has to. He moves from that group to visit with a man whose son went to school with his son Evan, and then talks to a little girl who is eating a bowl of grapes and asks her for one. She complies, stretching a tentative hand towards Stanley's scarlet mouth.

"Where's everybody else?" Stanley asks after a while, looking around for his bandmates.

"Well, the first is the best!" he chortles, in a moment of transformation when you hear his indoor voice beginning to merge with his higher-pitched stage voice. "You got the meal, next you get the salad," he says, and one immediately knows he's talking about Simmons – primarily because none of the Ultimate Fans ever ask to try on Thayer or Singer's boots or have personal photos taken with them.

Simmons finally emerges from his dressing room in the bowels of the venue a much more harrowing presence than the other three. His costumes are more elaborate and nightmarish, the mammoth boots seemingly pulled from some Chinese warlord's tomb, but his trademark topknot is not his own.

"That is a tremendous-looking ponytail. It can't be your own hair," I say before I think better of it.

"The answer is that the top half is an extension," Simmons answers unabashedly. "The bottom half is me. And the reason for that is because I sweat like a pig. If it was just my hair, then it gets wet and falls down. It's hair-sprayed a lot so it stands up. But about forty per cent of the topknot is fake."

"Just out of pure unabashed curiosity, since you answered that, when you meet someone can you tell they're a Paul person, a Gene person, an Eric person or a Tommy person?" I ask Simmons after he's posed with the three Ultimate Fans backstage. While not as touchy-feely or sincere as Stanley, he does make sure the Ultimate Fans have a memorable experience.

"When I meet fans? Yes. They're a certain body type and personality type. I'll answer, but it's horribly sexist: male or female?"

"Both, of course," I answer.

"The big guys like me. The sort of guys who are more in touch with their feminine side, more stylish and so on, like Paul. It's difficult to get a big football player who goes for Paul. I've noticed over the years they react to my sort of overtly heterosexual blah-blah-blah. In the past, people have thought that Paul was gay. And he's okay with that. But don't kid yourself, Paul isn't gay. But he's clearly comfortable wearing red lipstick and prancing around the stage or smacking his butt and all that. I'm not. Eric and Tommy get Kiss fans who appreciate them being in the band, but it's less about personality.

"As for females, the very pretty, model-y, attractive, thin, stylish women really like Paul. The very large-breasted, rounder ones love me. Some thinner ones, too, but mostly it's the healthier women."

"By the way, don't I owe you one of my paintings?" Stanley says to me as he passes me in the hall. I wrote a piece on Stanley for issue 235 of *Classic Rock* in May 2017, and he told me if he liked the story he'd send me a painting of his that I'd admired on the wall of his Beverly Hills home. I just thought he didn't like the story.

"I promise I'll send it when we get back home. It was the Jester, right?"

"Yes, the Jester. Do you have to like this story too before you send it?" I ask unnecessarily – since I already know the answer.

"Yes."

An accomplished artist whose paintings sell for $10,000 or more, he's currently finishing a self-portrait and paintings of his band members in make-up. He shows me a recent photo of one he's finishing of Jimmy Page in the famous white satin zodiac suit he wore on stage during Led Zeppelin's 1975 tour. While he's sent Page a few of his paintings over the years, beginning with a haunting portrait of Robert Johnson titled 'Crossroads', it's unclear whether this one of Page will remain with Stanley or not. It's impressionistic, yet captures the dark fire and even darker secrets in Page's angular face. Stanley has an uncanny ability to paint the inner person, with an almost supernatural insight, elevating his paintings from mere portraits. Is it too simplistic to think that that comes from wearing all that make-up and those elaborate costumes for the past 45 years?

"You do know we don't call them costumes," Thayer tells me with a short laugh, when I ask him about a blue stone embedded in the breastplate of his regalia.

"Oh, sorry."

"Maybe they used to call them costumes," he continues, warming to the subject. "But now we call them outfits. It feels more genuine that way or something.

"The new outfit was a conglomeration of several people. I think it really makes a statement, almost like an Iron Man kind of look, especially during the guitar solo – all of a sudden there's a beam of

"It's a lot of hard work to be in Kiss. All I can tell you right now is I won't miss anything." Eric Singer

Tommy Thayer: Space Ace Mk II.

KEITH LEROUX/PRESS x2

light coming out of the chest, a real superhero kind of vibe."

Which begs the question:, when did Kiss actually get that promotion, elevating them from antiheroes and sex villains to superheroes?

"We've been able pretty much consistently to keep going for about forty-five years," says Stanley. "The longer you can continue and the longer you can remain seemingly ageless, the more omnipotent you become. You take on the aura of superhero because you don't age, and you continue to maintain the same point of view. When I go out in the crowd on that zip-line, there's this sense of being invincible. And that feels good. And in the end, to be Superman with a guitar isn't nothing."

"You wanted the best! You got the best! The hottest band in the world!" booms the familiar introduction that's begun every Kiss show since 1975. The sound reverberates through the thick concrete walls of the Gila River Arena, 43 years and 24 miles from the first time Kiss fired up their first flash-pot on an Arizona stage back in 1976. Nearly 19,000 of the Kiss faithful are gathered here as four metal discs that look more than a little like flying saucers are lowered from 150-foot rafters, depositing the quartet on their elaborate stage like invaders from a distant planet. Which in most ways they are.

A Kiss show has been a spectacle since early days, but on this final run the pyro is bigger, the blood more excessive (these days it's a mix of raw eggs, yogurt and food coloring), the effects more mind-boggling (it takes 17 trucks to haul the gear from city to city) the hydraulics more sophisticated. But through all the changes of equipment as well as band members, there is something reliably predictable about a Kiss show that transcends time, tastes and epochs, tapping into something almost religious, something taboo and tribal.

'There is something reliably predictable about a Kiss show that transcends time, tastes and epochs.'

"How ya all doin'?" Stanley asks in his stage voice, pitched half an octave above his normal speaking one. He minces across the stage, a swashbuckler in black, a beautiful creature with sinewy arms and only the smallest hint of a stomach under his cut-out glitter-and-fringe vest. He dives into the first familiar chords of *Detroit Rock City*, beginning a two-hour, 20-song victory lap through the band's signature anthems, including such fan favorites as *Shout It Out Loud, Deuce* and *Cold Gin*.

"We're gonna play all kinds of stuff for you!" screeches Stanley. And he's right. Little is ignored as the band careens and mugs through the 70s and 80s with *Psycho Circus, War Machine, Lick It Up* and the disco-tastic *I Was Made For Loving You*. They even sneak in the little-played but stellar *Say Yeah* from their nineteenth album, 2009's *Sonic Boom*.

Three-quarters of the way through the set, Stanley asks: "How about I come out and see ya?" He leads both sides of the auditorium in a bidding war to see where he should go, before snapping on a harness and zip-lining to a platform behind the sound desk to perform two songs facing the front of the stage. "This is a cool place to be," he enthuses after the song finishes. "Because I can see Kiss!"

What he could also see, if he looked more closely into the faces of the audience waving, pointing and jumping up and down to get his attention, are the tears streaking many of the made-up faces. Even if Stanley claims that this last run isn't bittersweet, only sweet, most of these fan-faithful would disagree.

"Everything in life is a cycle," says Eric Singer, on the plane back to Los Angeles after the show. "Naturally, you have to complete the circle. I remember Gene and I were sitting in Las Vegas looking at the stage set-up. Gene looked at me in a moment of reflection and said: 'You know, it really is time.' And he's right. It's a lot of hard work to be in Kiss. It takes a lot out of you. I'll be sixty-one this year, Gene will be seventy, Paul is sixty-seven. Tommy will be fifty-eight. We're not kids. All I can tell you right now is I won't miss anything. Not at all."

"What will people miss when Kiss is gone?" Simmons asks rhetorically. "If you take it in the context of life as we know it on earth, there's not a whole lot that's important. You have brave men and women who put on uniforms and go to fight wars to protect freedom and die on the ▷

Pyromaniacs: there are no half-measures when it comes to a Kiss show.

battlefield, and that's a real thing. So in that context we're not very important. Kiss is sort of like sugar. On one hand, sugar is fun, tastes good, and makes you happy. When you stop sugar, you'll miss it. Maybe that's what it is," he says quietly.

"But I do know we raised the bar in terms of what you can expect now from bands. I don't care if you're McCartney or the Stones, you'll have fireworks at your shows. And that's because of Kiss, not Air Supply. That's our contribution. When that's gone, that's gone."

After the final confetti has been shaken loose and all the make-up has been sponged off, and all the equipment and hydraulics have been put back into their cases and hauled out to the waiting trucks, we file through the cavernous door of the Arena to a convoy of cars waiting to take us back to the private airstrip where we'll board the plane for the trip back to Los Angeles. By now it's after midnight and officially St Valentine's Day – a rather Kiss-tastic holiday.

Taking advantage of the theme, the crew have decorated the cabin of the plane appropriately; small trays have been ornately set up with pristine white china plates, crystal goblets and snowy white tablecloths. An array of treats are scattered artfully over the tables: foil-wrapped chocolate truffles, little sugar hearts, a single red rose. Containers with the dinner we all ordered are now set in the middle of each tray. Additional rose petals are strewn across the trays, but in the turbulence during the flight some of them have fallen on to the plane's carpeted floor.

"We raised the bar. I don't care if you're McCartney or the Stones, you'll have fireworks at your shows. And that's because of Kiss."

Gene Simmons

About to open up my container, I see Paul Stanley making his way toward the front of the plane. I figure he's coming to sit down at one of the tables. But it turns out that's not on his mind.

"Pick up those petals!" he admonishes, frowning as he looks down at the rather tasteful grey flooring. "They'll stain the carpet."

Taken aback, I think he's kidding, and start to giggle, but clearly he is not. So I bend down to gather up the errant petals and catch Tommy Thayer's eye and try very hard not to let the hint of a laugh escape. While Stanley's demand is a little obsessive, like Captain Queeg and the strawberry incident from *Caine's Mutiny*, it's also very telling.

"We've got this plane for a long time, why not keep it looking good," he says.

Which is pretty much what he has done with Kiss for the past 45 years, finally bringing them down for a landing sometime in 2020.

"I think Paul is the driver of the car," explains Tommy Thayer, strapped back in his seat after all the petals are picked up.

"It's like you all have to be in the same car. You all have to be going to the same destination. That's how bands work if you're going to maintain some level of sanity and success. But there's only one steering wheel, and I don't care if you've got a fucking eighteen-wheeler or however many people in your band, only one guy can drive the car. And that guy that mans that wheel has to really not only know how to drive that vehicle, he's also got to know the road that he's navigating.

"Gene is the engine. Or maybe the gasoline," Thayer continues. "No, I think Gene's more the fuel," he decides. "Gene is the fuel that helps drive that engine."

"Gas?" I offer, with a laugh.

"I did not say that," Thayer counters, a little tartly. "But the thing is, both of them got us where we are now. The only sad thing, now, when it's almost over, is that people have stopped thinking of me as the new guy…" he says, staring out of the window into the darkness over the Arizona landscape 30,000 feet below…

KEITH LEROUX/PRESS

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"IT'S A CELEBRATION"

So Paul Stanley tells *Guitar World*, when asked what fans can expect to witness on Kiss' End of the Road tour. And whether or not you're a tried-and-true member of the Kiss Army, one thing that can be agreed upon is there's certainly plenty for Kiss to be celebrating. The band, always with co-founders and main songwriters Stanley and Gene Simmons at the helm, have experienced incredible highs and more than a few lows in the 45 years since the release of their self-titled debut album. But one thing that has never wavered is their commitment to delivering a show worthy of four guys who call themselves the "Hottest Band in the World."

FROM THE GUITAR WORLD ARCHIVE 2019

Words: **Richard Bienstock** Portraits: **Jen Rosenstein**

"The RIAA tells us we have more gold records than any American group, in any category, in history," says Simmons °with his characteristic bluster. "I could give a fuck, by the way. The only thing that means anything to me is you get up onstage and people love what you do. The rest is just blah, blah, blah."

That commitment to the live experience is largely the reason the band — which these days also includes guitarist Tommy Thayer and drummer Eric Singer — is calling the End of the Road tour their final outing. "You want to go out on top," Simmons says.

And as Paul and Gene explain in the following interviews, when they say "final," they mean it. "It's one of those great occasions where you know what's coming next," Stanley says. "You get to cherish the moment, knowing that the moment will pass. You hear so many times people say, 'I wish I had known…' Well, this is a chance for all of us to have that one last hurrah together, because we know that's it. And there's nothing bittersweet about it. It's all just sweet."

Guitar World recently sat down separately with Stanley and Simmons ("often when we do interviews together, there's not enough oxygen in the room," Gene explains) to discuss the End of the Road tour and the long journey they've taken together to get to this point. In addition, the two talked about the various members who have been in and out of Kiss over the years — including guitarists Ace Frehley, Vinnie Vincent and Bruce Kulick — and whether any or all of them might show up for this last "hurrah"; the particulars of their long-lasting relationship; and just what they'll be up to after the curtain finally closes on Kiss.

Until then, expect to find them out on the road doing what they've done, arguably better than anyone, for close to half a century.

"You come to see Kiss, you walk in through those gates and it's electric church," Simmons says. "You know, glory Hallelujah. All hail rock 'n' roll."

[from left] Tommy Thayer, Gene Simmons, Eric Singer and Paul Stanley, photographed in Van Nuys, California, October 17, 2018

GENE SIMMONS

A lot of bands embark on farewell tours, only to come back out a few years later and pick up right where they left off. How do we know this is really it for Kiss?
I understand, I understand. People might not believe it. But let's just call it for what it is — it's the final tour. Because you want to go out on top. I'm 69. Still strong. Still look good. Still have hair on my head…although I have a lot more on my back now. But by the time this tour finishes I'll be 72. So if I was in the Stones or U2 I could run around onstage in sneakers and a T-shirt and never break a sweat. And both those bands are great. But Kiss is a different animal — we're like heavy artillery. We're armored. I wear eight-inch platform heels and it takes hours to put on the makeup and the studs and all the stuff, and then I fly through the air with no net, shoot fire out of my ass, Paul flies off at the stage wearing 40 pounds of armor… We all love Jagger and Bono, but if they put in the amount of work we put in, they'd drop dead in a half hour.

Lazy guys.
I love them to death and respect those guys. But all they have to do is sing.

Kiss has always been celebrated for its live show. But do you feel you've gotten your due as a songwriter or a musician?
I don't care. Means nothing to me. ASCAP gave myself and Paul the songwriters medal of honor, whatever that's called [the ASCAP Founders Award]. It means nothing. The only thing that means anything, that includes boxers or baseball players or anybody, is when you get up to bat or when you get in the ring and your bosses are standing on their seats. And, by the way, that's our job. We're not political. We don't talk about the secret of life because we don't have a clue what it is. Our job is to make you forget the traffic jam, the fact that your girlfriend is elbowing you because you're looking at that girl over there with the set of double D's, all that other stuff that tortures everybody. With Kiss, it's magic time.

Your relationship with Paul Stanley goes back almost half a century...
I've known him longer than anyone…other than my mother.

Well, there you go. Had you not met Paul all those years ago, where would Gene Simmons be right now?
Where would I be? Nowhere. Because there is something called chemistry. Although it's fair to say Paul and I are completely different people. But we're two different sides of the same coin. I don't have any brothers or sisters on my mother's side. But certainly Paul would be the brother I never had. And we constantly disagree about all sorts of things, but we share the important values that make great relationships last a lifetime. Love of family. Don't abandon your kids. Show up on time. Do the work. Be gracious. Have a work ethic. Do all that stuff. And if you're lucky, goddammit, and if you're blessed to have the right thing at the right place at the right time, then you're even more lucky if you find somebody else you can work with. Because if Jagger has an off night, the Stones aren't so good. But if I have an off night, I know Paul's going to push it through to the goal. Same as when he has an off night. And don't kid yourself — Tommy and Eric often give us good kicks in the pants, too.

You bring up chemistry. It's no secret that fans are hoping to see the original Kiss lineup, with Ace and Peter, reunite somehow, somewhere, on this tour.
Well, let me address that. You know, in life, mother nature is nonjudgmental. Whether you're a baby and have never experienced life or whether you're old and grey and have gone through the trials and tribulations, both of you, when you put your hand into the fire, get burned equally. So life doesn't give you three chances. You get one chance. But Ace and Peter have gotten three chances. They were in and out of the band — fired — three times. For drugs, alcohol, bad behavior, being unprofessional… all the clichés are clichés. Even suicide is overrated. It's been done many times. So the only reason Ace and Peter were let go the first time, and then the second time and then the third time, is that they weren't carrying their load. You can't be in a car with two flat tires. It's not going to go anywhere. It's your responsibility to change the fucking tires so that the whole car doesn't stop. It's nothing personal. Because remember — being in a band is a gift. You hardly work. Physically, anyway. So the short answer to your question is we'd love to have Ace and Peter join us here and there. And if they don't, it's not going to be because of us. But they're never going to be in Kiss again.

Gene Simmons with one of his ubiquitous custom GS Axe basses

That's pretty definitive.
Three times is the charm. "I promise I'll pull out" doesn't work. It's the boy who cried wolf: "Oh, I've been straight for a million years." Terrific! Have a good life! Would we welcome Ace or Peter to jump up onstage for a song or two? Of course. Could we depend on either Ace or Peter to do a full set night after night? Not on your fucking life.

On that note, Vinnie Vincent recently resurfaced following decades out of the public eye. You played a short acoustic set with him in Nashville earlier in 2018. Any chance he could be welcomed back into the Kiss fold?
Listen, there's personal and there's business. It's worth stating that Vinnie has sued the band and lost 14 times. I'm not here to cast any aspersions. He's a talented guy. That's why he was in the band. But would I depend on him to get up onstage and do anything? Never.

What about having him come up on stage and play, say, "Lick It Up"?
No. Never. Never happen. No. How many times do you want to get sued before you say that's enough?

So he's a guy that wouldn't even necessarily be welcomed as a guest at one of the End of the Road shows.
Can he come to the shows? Of course! Anybody can. But onstage? Never.

I'd imagine we might see Bruce Kulick up there.
We love Bruce. Bruce and Ace were on the Kiss Kruise and they both came up and jammed a few songs with us and all that stuff. And Bruce never did anything wrong. He was always professional and showed up on time. But, you know, times changed and we decided to do what was right for the band [Kulick's tenure in Kiss ended when the band reunited with Frehley and Criss in the mid Nineties]. So I can never say anything bad about Bruce. Total professional. Great guitar player. Just a real stand-up guy. I would call him a friend.

Okay, so it sounds like there's a possibility of seeing Ace and Bruce up onstage at some point.
You know, we're gonna find out a lot of stuff. But we're not doing anything thinking, How do we sell tickets? Because the tour's already sold out. But people will say whatever they want to say, and think whatever they want to think, and that's okay. Social media is, you know, the garbage fill of all time, where everybody, whether they're qualified or not, can say whatever they want and then it either catches fire or not. I know somebody very close to me who believes the moon is hollow and the aliens are inside. And you may be able to guess who that is.

Vinnie Vincent?
No, but you're close. [laughs]

To finish up, let's look a few years into the future. Kiss has just played the final show on the End of the Road tour. What does Gene Simmons do when he wakes up the next day?
Well, I have nine other businesses that take up my time, including my music festival, Titans of Rock, which launches this August in Grand Forks, North Dakota. We'll have, oh, I don't know, 40,000 or 50,000 people. And we have 20 shows lined up. Then I have real estate, I have restaurants… I think I'll be busy.

> **"The short answer to your question is we'd love to have Ace and Peter join us here and there. And if they don't, it's not going to be because of us. But they're never going to be in Kiss again"**

Will you miss Kiss?
Oh, of course. Are you kidding? When we started this thing — and it's really important to give Ace and Peter credit along with Paul and me — we didn't know shit. We were the four most unqualified bums off the streets of New York. I don't know, they call it a singularity in signs, but it just happened. Without managers, without marketing, without anybody. We're not One Direction without Simon Cowell. We ain't the Monkees. We were just four guys in a rat-infested fire trap of a loft. We really did it ourselves. The honesty, integrity and authenticity of Kiss, it came from our hearts. And that's great. So I don't know what will happen in the future, but Kiss will not tour anymore, I can tell you that. But I'll always be known as that guy with that tongue. And that's okay. Who wouldn't want that?

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PAUL STANLEY

A lot of bands embark on farewell tours...and then come back a few years later to do it again. How do we know this is really it for Kiss?

Well, our age for starters. [laughs] Obviously there are people who are cynical, but those people are cynical to begin with. And yes, we did a farewell tour 19 years ago, but to qualify that, the circumstances were so different. It was short-sighted and it wasn't too long after we finished with it we realized we didn't want to say farewell to Kiss, we wanted to say farewell to the two people [Ace Frehley and Peter Criss] who had become a ball and chain on Kiss. So to do this now, we're doing it for the total opposite reasons. The band gets on great. Everybody's having a great time. Everybody enjoys each other's company. We sound great. With that said, we're also aware this doesn't become easier as time goes on. For us to maintain what we do at the level we do it, it's finite. There's an expiration date.

Kiss has always been lauded for its live show. Do you ever crave that same recognition for your own songwriting or guitar playing?

I don't crave anything I don't have. The people who choose not to see what should be fairly apparent are choosing not to see it. So I have no wishes for accolades. My track record speaks for itself. Let me put it this way: the people who understand us see the totality, and the people who don't, don't. Life's too short to waste your time trying to make converts of people who don't like you. It's barely long enough to spend time with the ones who do.

As a songwriter, was there a first Kiss song, or even a pre-Kiss song, that you wrote that made you feel, "I can do this"?

Well, some of my pre-Kiss songs became Kiss songs. So that says something. "Firehouse" was written when I was in high school. "Let Me Know" was written before Kiss. So I had a very clear understanding of what I wanted to do and what I thought made a great songwriter and great songwriting. And I was a huge fan of songwriters. I was a fan of everything that was coming out of the Brill Building — Carole King and Gerry Goffin, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, Neil Sedaka. You had all these amazing songwriters who were schooled in how to do this, how to have a good song with a verse and a chorus and a bridge. There's a structure that goes beyond just rambling. That's why the chorus is called a hook. I have always tried to adhere to that, and write songs that, by the time you hear the second verse, you can sing the second chorus.

What would you say are your strengths as a guitarist?

I think that I've always managed to be the foundation and the core of what we build together. For example, in the past when we've tried cutting a basic track without me, once I put my guitar on we usually find out that we have to recut it. Because there's a swing to what I do. So I'm a big believer in the absolute necessity of a great rhythm guitar to not only hold this kind of music together, but to propel it forward. And propelling it forward doesn't necessarily mean being ahead of it. A great rhythm guitarist basically leans on the drums. You're closer to being on the backbeat then you are to being in front of it.

What's your main setup onstage for the End of the Road tour?

I'm a dedicated Ibanez PS10 user [Stanley's signature model]. That guitar, with a few diversions for different reasons along my history, has been my guitar of choice. I certainly collected a lot of vintage guitars at one point, and my PS10 was spec'd on some of those guitars. So it really is a classic guitar in many senses. In fact, if you were to put it into someone's hands and they weren't looking at it and just went basically on feel and sound, they would perhaps think it was a different guitar by a different company.

As for amps, I've been using Engl for quite a while and I've had great success with them. They do some amps that aren't really my taste, that sound more like a jackhammer [laughs]. But they also build some really classic, well-refined tube amps. Mine have been fine-tuned to how I like them, and in the best way hearken to the sound of bands that I've loved over the years. So my guitar and my amp are rooted in the classics. Whether or not they are the actual classics they're rooted in is moot.

You've known Gene almost half a century. Had you not met him, would you have been able to accomplish everything that you have?

I can't imagine having accomplished a fraction of what I've accomplished without Gene. It was clear to me early on that we should be together in spite of whatever differences there are in our personalities. And let me also say that Gene — perhaps because of his personality and a desire to incite emotions in people — has really not gotten the accolades that he deserves as a bass player. The fact that he plays what he plays and sings at the same time, and that the roots of his playing are so classic — it's like Ron Wood when he was with Jeff Beck, or Paul McCartney or Jack Bruce or Felix Pappalardi — he's just a terrific bass player.

And when he puts his mind to it he's a terrific songwriter. So I'm well aware that what we created and built together could never have been done by either of us alone. And the older we get, I think the more we covet and cherish that.

Fans have been speculating about the possibility of a reunion of the guys that started Kiss alongside you and Gene on this final tour. What are the chances we'll see Ace and Peter get up onstage with you at some point?

It's really not up to me. But I'll say that this is a celebration of this band and its accomplishments and history. So anybody who was short-sighted enough to think this should be a reunion is missing the point. That being said, I would love to see everybody at one point or another be onstage. If that doesn't happen, it's their choice, not mine.

If you're talking about everybody, does that include former guitarists like Bruce

Paul Stanley: "I would love to see everybody be onstage."

Kulick and Vinnie Vincent?
Well, Bruce's band played on the Kiss Kruise [the band's festival at sea], and they were phenomenal. I was listening to some of the Eighties and Nineties Kiss songs that he did live and frankly it made me very proud. He did a terrific job. So Bruce is somebody who shouldn't be overlooked or underestimated as far as his role in this band. Now Vinnie, that's one exception, and for so many reasons. I would say that's not someone who I want to celebrate.

You've talked about having an expanded setlist on this tour, but you've also been adamant about the fact that you don't feel there's room to include obscurities in the show. That said, are there any Kiss deep cuts out there that you would love to play, even if you won't actually get around to doing them?
There really aren't, quite honestly. There are songs from my first solo album [1978's Paul Stanley] and those got taken care of on my solo tour for Live to Win [Stanley's 2006 solo album]. And last year on the Kruise we played "Wouldn't You Like to Know Me?" [from Paul Stanley] But I think the public has it right. I think the songs that are the most popular are the ones that should be the most popular. And to appease or satisfy a really minute handful of people in an 18,000-seat arena, we'll leave 17,990 people going, "What was that?" So what we want to do is celebrate all the eras of the band, and there's enough songs — whether you go from "Firehouse" to "Black Diamond," "Heaven's on Fire" to "Hell or Hallelujah," "Psycho Circus" to "C'mon and Love Me" — that are well known that to take up space in the show to play something that nobody knows is just beyond me. I mean, I remember going to see the Stones once at the Wiltern in L.A., and they did a whole night of rarities. It was pretty damn boring.

Let's look a few years into the future. Kiss just played the final show on the End of the Road tour. What does Paul Stanley do when he wakes up the next day?
More. The idea that I would ever retire, that's kind of like retiring from life. I'm not Yoda, but let me tell ya, if you don't wake up every day excited at the prospects of what the day has to offer, you're either depressed and should see somebody about that, or you're not living. So what am I going to do? What I do now. I paint. I'll probably write some songs. Maybe go in the studio and do an album. Spend time with my family. The only thing I won't be doing is touring.

Will you miss Kiss?
I am Kiss! And I mean that in the best way. I consider Kiss my band. And I do think and hope everybody else in the band feels the same. It's a big part of who I am and who I always will be. So I don't see missing Kiss, because Kiss is always here with me.

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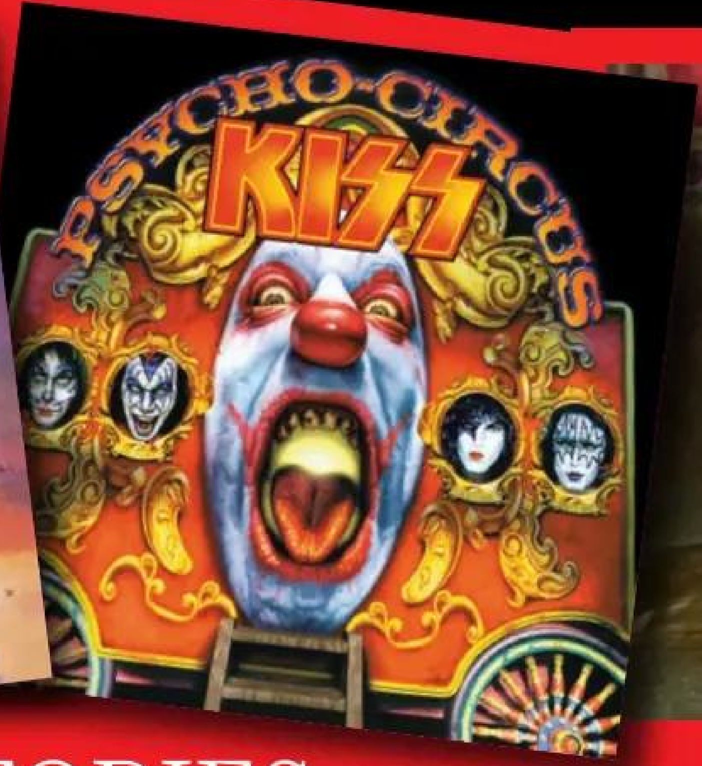

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